

# **MYTH, MIND, MESSIAH**

**EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN  
RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS INTERFAITH DIALOGUE  
FROM WITHIN KEN WILBER'S INTEGRAL  
HERMENEUTICS**

by

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**INTEGRAL HERMENEUTICS**

**Summary:**

Interfaith dialogue is no luxury for Christians living in a pluralistic, effervescent world of intermingling, multi-religious realities. Many Christians take seriously their responsibility towards interfaith dialogue. However, different Christians understand this responsibility in different ways, which often leads to acrimonious accusations of unchristian dialogical approaches. The question is whether there is any means of ordering and assessing the Christian responsibility towards other religions in a mutually uplifting and increasingly holistic way? Ken Wilber provides an integral, or All-Quadrant, All-Level hermeneutics that may assist us with an answer. All holons – which means everything in the “Kosmos” – emerge or arise in holarchical fashion. On one level, it is a whole, on the next transcendent level it is a part of the whole. This process is infinite and is only ever released in One Taste/salvation/Nirvana/the Kingdom of God, or simply unqualifiable Suchness. Wilber provides an integrated methodology for understanding the process by which holons find their release in One Taste. The holon of Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue also emerges through discreet, recognizable stages. Each stage is integrated into the next higher level. The lower levels are more *fundamental* since they exist as a part of the higher levels. However, the higher levels are more *significant*, since they have an increased capacity to explore aspects of dialogue previously hidden. The levels we explore are the mythic rational, the rational and the centauric. These levels emerge through four interrelated dimensions or Quadrants: the Upper Left or spiritual/faith dimension of the person entering into dialogue, the Upper Right Quadrant or theology of dialogue that emerges, the Lower Left or communal and interpretive realm, and Lower Right which covers the social organizational patterns with which the person in dialogue chooses to associate him or herself. We define *responsibility* in terms of these four Quadrants: The *response* or theology (UR) of the person is dependent upon her response-*ability*, or interior faith development (UL), which is informed by the worldview (LL) of her faith community to whom she feels *responsible*, with the sociological patterns of her community (LR), to some extent, offers clues as to her stage of development.

**Key words:**

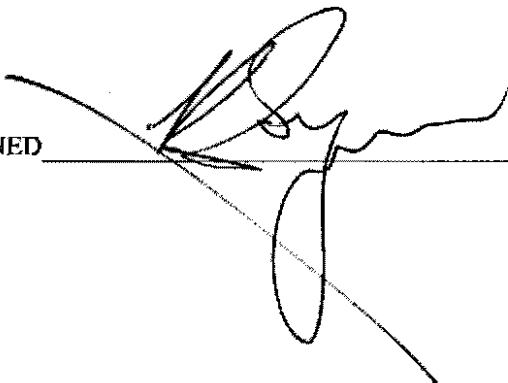
Interfaith dialogue; Integral hermeneutics; Ken Wilber; Christian dialogical responsibility; transpersonal theology; interreligious dialogue, Holons, Holistic embrace; pluralism; structural-developmental dialogue; mythic rationalism, centauric theology; stages of religious dialogue; AQAL approach

### **Declaration**

I declare that

**MYTH, MIND, MESSIAH: EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS INTERFAITH DIALOGUE FROM  
WITHIN KEN WILBER'S INTEGRAL HERMENEUTICS**

is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated  
and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNED  DATE 1 APRIL 2003

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 The Central Research Problem

Let us begin with as bold and precise a question as possible in order to carefully capture the core intent of this thesis.

*Is there a way of ordering and assessing the Christian responsibility towards other religions, with regard to interfaith dialogue, in an ever deepening and increasingly holistic, mutually interpenetrating, and mutually correcting way?*

Our answer is resoundingly in the affirmative. I choose, however, to travel outside of the normal systematic theological boundaries of Scriptural revelation, Greek ontological categories and church doctrine to find a hermeneutical orientation, yet remaining true – as I only can precisely as a follower of Christ – to the crucial Christological assertion of *assumptio carnis* - God is made flesh in Christ. This essay seeks to map out and explore, given the contemporary macroecumenical paradigm, the processes that cultivate and deepen the levels of Christian responsibility for interfaith dialogue, and it does so in terms of Ken Wilber's integral hermeneutics. We intend to show, then, that Ken Wilber's hermeneutics can and does provide a template, or critical hermeneutics, against which we might understand the cultivation of an increasingly holistic Christian responsibility towards the crucial task of interfaith dialogue.

Following from this, we intend to trace how each stage of that process includes and transcends the previous stage: the centauric stage of interfaith dialogical responsibility (that is what *Messiah* refers to in the title) includes but transcends the rational stage (*mind*), and the rational stage of dialogue includes but transcends the mythic-rational stage (*myth*).

The contours of this intent need unpacking. Our *a priori* assumptions need to be identified and made explicit.

First, we take for granted that fact of *interfaith dialogue* in the life of the contemporary Christian. Thousands of Christians are living with, working with, and talking to adherents of other faiths. There may be many who choose to ignore this reality. This, we assert, in no way changes the facts of the matter. For other Christians, to ignore this religiously pluralistic reality in our world is neither possible nor desirable, whatever their personal feelings or theological stance towards the complications issuing there from.

This leads to the second point: once it is acknowledged that interfaith dialogue is an existent reality, the next assertion we make is that Christians have a *responsibility* towards involvement in interfaith dialogue. Christians are called to be in the world as Christ was incarnationally in the world. In the face of the challenge presented by the fact of other faiths, followers of an incarnated Christ can but exercise that responsibility.

Our third assumption follows from this: Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue, like all living realities, is a *dynamic process* that has the potential to grow. It deepens, or develops, just as does any living reality. It does not remain in a static, once-and-for-all state of affairs. In addition, we assume that it can be shown that the stages through which that deepening occurs can be reasonably and accurately



determined. The question that arises, once we accept that these assumptions bear at least some substance, has to do with which yardstick we choose to measure the development and growth of this Christian responsibility towards dialogue.

Thus, our fourth point in this regard refers to *Ken Wilber's integral hermeneutics*,<sup>1</sup> which we will use to guide our determination and assessment of the growth of the Christians responsibility with respect to interfaith dialogue.

Finally, the context in which the issues of Christian responsibility to dialogue occur is what J.S. Krüger<sup>2</sup> has called *macroecumenical*, and this fifth point will be more accurately spelled out in the course of this introduction.

In the next five sections, we shall briefly map out some of the contours, problems and implications or the assumptions just mentioned.

### 1.1.1 Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is a reality today. How did this situation arise, from a Christian historical perspective, given the certainty of Christians in much of the early part of the last century that Christianity would prevail over all other faiths? When John R. Mott (Bosch 1991:337 ff.) called the first World Mission Conference in 1910, he was motivated by a deep sense of urgency in the light of what he saw as the need to take the Gospel to every part of the world in order to convert it to Christ. The last century's early Christian ecumenical movements were thoroughly optimistic that the world would soon be christianised, and began to make a concerted attempt to overcome hindrances to this classic missionary task of "winning the world for Christ." It made

very little sense at this time through most of the church to think of anything but conquering the other faiths for the sake of the Kingdom.

However, for various reasons to which we shall return, Christians were not immune to the break down in confidence in the core values of the Enlightenment, especially after the First Great European War. Since it became abundantly clear that complete certainty could not be established in matters of science and technology, less so in psychological and moral issues, this realization of our inability to grasp the fullness of truth begged the question of Christianity too. Could it not be possible that Christians were not entirely correct, and that other faiths had truths to offer? One surely cannot establish this through a self-confident *fiat* delivered in splendid isolation, but only through the study of their religious texts and engaging their adherents in dialogue.

An important landmark for the widespread concientisation of Christians about interfaith dialogue was established in 1956, according to Wesley Ariarajah (1998:9), when theologians and lay Christians were asked to work on P.D. Devanandan's study project, the "Word of God and the living faiths of men."<sup>3</sup> This paper was a continuation of the deeply divisive discussions that has arisen from Hendrik Kraemer's (1938) work *The Christian message in a non-Christian world*, which for the first time saw an evangelical theologian systematically argue for a more dialogical approach from Christians towards other faiths. The subsequent debates were important because it established as a principle among a much wider range of conservative theological opinion that adherents of other faiths were to be more than merely objects of discussion in theological discourse. They were to become partners in mutual conversation on issues of faith. At last, interfaith dialogue was not only here to stay, it was to become a crucially important theological, spiritual, hermeneutic and sociological necessity for Christianity's engagement in the world.

The impact of interfaith dialogue on the traditional understanding of Christian mission has clearly been as decisive as it has been disturbing. The classic Protestant theology that had emphasised the One so very well – One Lord, One faith, One baptism, One way and One community – reduced a billion deeply religious non-Christians around the world to One Vast Missionary Field. This narrow (some would call fascist) approach in Christianity has arguably rendered it (i.e. this approach) the least suited to coping with the Many that populate the real world which is, unarguably, religiously plural.

The question that demands decisive deliberation is whether the inner logic of Christian theology/ies, perhaps even the theologies of all the monotheistic religions, enable these religions to be truly open to other expressions of faith – nontheistic, multitheistic or metatheistic. However, the existential reality of living and working with adherents of other faiths in this multivalent world has forced Christians and others to reflect anew on the traditional attitudes towards their (non)/religious neighbours. Many have chosen to ignore the issues. Others, however, have actually entered into dialogue with people of differing faiths. This may have been in the form of a casual conversation over coffee in the work canteen. Better still, it may have been in the praxis of shouldering a shared responsibility for addressing issues of social concern (AIDS, poverty, ecological and humanitarian crises). It may even have taken on a more formal attempt to dialogue in community based or international dialogical conferences, such as the Parliament of the World's Religions.

The actual experience of dialogue with adherents of another faith has the advantage of allowing Christians to realize that the dream of a common Christian language<sup>4</sup> is not only impossible, it is undesirable. For dialogue to be dialogue, and not to devolve into irenic and self-congratulatory backslapping, differences ought to be treasured<sup>5</sup>.

What becomes obvious in the course of dialogue with other faiths is that there is a renewed need for dialogue among other Christians, precisely because discourse is found to be slippery. At times, it favours dispersal and anarchy rather than centering and hierarchy, and vice versa at other times.<sup>6</sup> For every unity and mutuality created by the common Christian faith, there is at least as much disjunction, dissonance and countervailing. These disjunctions are painfully revealed in dialogue with other religions. How do my discoveries of the insights of Buddhism shift me from the comfort zones of my Christian perspectives, and how does this set me at odds with my sisters and brothers? This impels the dialogian<sup>7</sup> to return to prayer, to contemplation, and to dialoguing *intra*-religiously.

The process itself has offered to all Christians the gift of humility, the opportunity to be a little less arrogant with their own theological stances, a little more open to the truths that are offered, even if hidden, in the convictions, worldviews, beliefs and rituals of other faiths. Amidst the clamour of the often conflicting and emotionally laden opinions surrounding the issues for or against dialogue, can we find a way of respecting and honouring all Christian approaches, damaging none? We can, I maintain, once we establish beyond all dispute that Christians have a God-given *responsibility* to engage in interfaith dialogue.

### 1.1.2 Christian Dialogical Responsibility

In an attempt to make sense of one individual's interest in, and experience of, interfaith dialogue precisely as a committed Christian, this paper tackles head on the question of the Christian's responsibility with regard to interfaith dialogue. The thesis

limits itself to the Christian problem for the sake of brevity, although there is much evidence to suggest that every faith finds itself facing the need to take seriously its responsibilities for dialogue.

I have taken liberties with the definition of the term “responsibility” and have divided it into four areas. These, as we shall see, correspond with Wilber’s four existential realms, or holonic Quadrants.

In a meeting of people of different faiths, who have gathered for the purpose of sharing themselves in a mutually open and deeply respectful way, we find that, firstly, the Christian individual comes with certain levels of personal development. This includes her or his spiritual depth, stage of moral, cognitive, affective, object relations and faith development. The levels of these areas of development will determine the ability, or capacity, of the individual for dialogue. This first realm, then, is her or his *response-ability*. When we deal with Wilber’s hermeneutics, we shall see that this ability to respond to the dialogical situation corresponds with Wilber’s Upper Left Quadrant, or Inner Personal dimension of a holon.

Secondly, no religious person is an island unto herself. A very particular interpretive community of faith nurtures and sustains her. In turn, she has a responsibility to that community to be faithful to its original witness, but also to challenge its past interpretations of faith through the leading of the Spirit that “blows where it wills”, leading that community into ever deeper and greater truths. In other words, the Christian has a *responsibility* towards the hermeneutical and interpretive dimension of her or his community of faith that has helped to interpret, nurture, encourage and sustain that person’s faith. This responsibility corresponds with Wilber’s Lower Left Quadrant, or the Cultural Dimension of a holon, or the community’s internal, interpretive dimension.

Thirdly, the community of each Christian who enters into dialogue has a particular historical, organizational and structural form. This corresponds, as we shall see, with Wilber's Lower Right Quadrant, the exterior of the collective, or the Sociological Dimension of a holon, such as, for our purposes, the church structure with which the dialogian chooses to associate herself.

Fourthly, there comes the *response* itself in whatever form it takes; it is the word spoken; a response, a dialogue, or a theological paper. This is the holon's exterior of the individual. We shall examine the development of the theology of Christian interfaith dialogue in this Quadrant. Note what we are claiming; that one's theology concerning interfaith issues can be viewed as growing through various stages, more or less in tandem with the measurable growth in spirituality and faith, hermeneutical skills, and choice of church or religious community structure.

These four realms are essentially the three philosophical or Kantian realms of the True (It), the Good (We) and the Beautiful (I) as long as it is understood that both Right Hand quadrants refer to outer observable quantities, and are as such both "It", or "It" and Its", if one prefers. To summarise the issue as succinctly as possible then: the Christian *response* (It) to the other faiths is interdependently related to the stage of development of that Christian's *response-ability* (I), which again is interdependently related to that Christian's fundamental *responsibility* (We) to her or his community<sup>8</sup>. This community has a visible, structural shape or form usually called a church, cell group, monastery, interfaith community and so on.

### 1.1.3 This Responsibility Develops

For many Christians trying to operate within Christianity's traditional theological and missionary mandate, it is not always obvious or clear that they have a responsibility to enter into a mutual dialogue with adherents of other faiths. Why dialogue with those who are destined for hell? Is there not rather a need -- the sake of saving their souls -- to convert them to Christianity? For Christians within this paradigm, people of other faiths are objects of discussion rather than partners in that discussion<sup>9</sup>. The dialogical responsibility for such a Christian might be defined as a defence against the evil and heresy of the unbeliever's religious beliefs, or as a need to convince unbelievers of the salvific correctness of their particular Christian belief in Christ.

However, the boundaries of dialogical responsibility do widen for those who accept the challenges of a less prescriptive approach. There is a deepening of the person's responsibility towards our four-fold definition of dialogue. Their dialogical responsibility undergoes a deepening, a growth, a transformation into a transcendent, wider and more inclusive realm that has clearly recognizable, universal or cross-cultural characteristics.

In the course of this process of deepening, not all is smooth sailing. Often, particularly perplexing problems prevail that may threaten to throw the dialogical ship off course. These problems arise not only from the complexities of the dialogical process itself, but also because of the myriad -- and all-too often clashing -- opinions of different and differing denominations, grappling groups, and in-fighting individuals. The clashes concern the character, content, and the contours of their dialogical responsibilities. Problems are integral to the process of transcending limited perspectives. This thesis, however, is particularly interested in the *development* of the Christian's dialogical responsibility -- "responsibility" understood in terms of our fourfold definition. Of course, to speak of "a Christian" is an abstraction if one desires the term to cover

more than just one particular individual. However, is it any less an abstraction to speak of a “Lutheran” or a “Roman Catholic” perspective? I can speak only for myself, and only from within my own context. Yet the occasions of my particularity touches the universal as only particularity can. As I recount my journey, others will find resonances that release, by God’s grace, something of worth possibly applicable to their particular journey. This leads to an increasing awareness of self and the theologically or religiously other, which “amounts to the expansion of the boundaries of one’s *responsibility*<sup>10</sup>”, says J.S. Krüger. (1982:44 italics mine).

What exactly are those boundaries of restricted responsibility? Why do they exist, how are they challenged by the other Christian perspectives, and what processes allow for their expansion? Put another way, how does that responsibility grow? Quite clearly a fundamental assumption of the thesis is that the Christian’s responsibility *vis-à-vis* dialogue is not static but grows with religious maturity. As the religious person grows in faith and understanding, in knowledge and social adequacy, so too does her freedom and her responsibility to that which is considered religiously “Other”.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty for a religious person with regard to interfaith dialogue is to find a way to be increasingly open towards the dialogical partner, while simultaneously remaining fully committed to the tenets of her or his own faith.

Do the Christian individual and community have the intellectual, spiritual and moral fortitude to respond adequately to the challenges thrown up by dialogue? I believe resoundingly that Christians certainly do. However, they simply cannot go about their lives as Christians while ignoring the insights and gifts offered by those inspired and informed by other faith traditions. Wilfred Cantwell Smith (in Ariarajah 1998:15) warns that doing theology without any consciousness and knowledge of other religious traditions and of the faith of others leave one hopelessly out of touch. It is



my intention to utilize the gift offered by an integrated understanding of Buddhism married with Western psychological and philosophical scholarship as is offered through the seminal works of Ken Wilber.

#### 1.1.4 One Taste: the foundation of Wilber's integral hermeneutics

I shall leave aside for the moment the question of whether it is legitimate to use the work of a self-professed Buddhist as a template for understanding the growth of *Christian* responsibility for interfaith dialogue. Even though the task of trying to come to grips with Wilber's integral hermeneutics is nothing short of daunting, we shall examine Wilber's integral hermeneutics in some detail in Chapter 2. For now, so I shall offer a very brief introduction to what I believe is the foundation of Wilber's thinking.

If there is a golden thread that runs as a theme through Wilber's not insubstantial work, it is that body, mind and soul are not mutually exclusive. Wilber (2000:viii) maintains that the "desires of the flesh, the ideas of the mind, and the luminosities of the soul [are all] perfect expressions of the radiant Spirit that alone inhabits the universe." This means that ultimately, there is only "One Taste in the entire Kosmos", from which all things issue and to which all things return. In between this descending and ascending from One Taste, we find that the "story of this moment is... the dream, and sometimes the nightmare, from which we would do well to awaken."

Wilber (2000:89) describes his own experience of One Taste, which comes about as a result of the disappearance of pure witnessing awareness, which in itself still contains

traces of a subject/object duality as it witnesses the world as “transparent and shimmering object.” When this Witness itself disappears into everything that it witnesses, subject and object do not disappear, or become nothing, but become what they have always been. That is “One Taste”, or “Suchness”, which Wilber describes quite beautifully:

There is no time in this estate, though time passes through it. Clouds float by in the sky, thoughts float by in the mind, waves float by in the ocean, and I am all of that. I am looking at none of it, for there is no center around which perception is organized. It is simply that everything is arising, moment to moment, and I am all of that. I do not see the sky, I am the sky, which sees itself.... I do not hear the birds, I am the birds, which hear themselves. There is nothing outside of me, there is nothing inside of me, because there is no me – there is simply all... the same One Taste. This is not a trance, or a lessening of consciousness, but rather an intensification of it [and] not an out-of-the-body experience. Most of all, One Taste is utter simplicity. With mystical experiences<sup>11</sup> in the subtle and causal, there is often a sense of grandeur, of ominous awesomeness, of numinous overwhelmingness, of light and bliss and beatitude, of gratefulness and joy. Nevertheless, not with One Taste, which is extraordinarily ordinary, and perfectly simple: *just this*.

It is from this level of conscious realization within himself that Wilber begins to map out his integral philosophy. A crucial observation is to note that Wilber does not merely wax lyrical about his approach. It is, for him, more like his primary spiritual practice. At the heart of Wilber’s integral methodology lies Sri Ramana’s realization, following Shankara (in Wilber 1995:302, 2000:188):

The world is illusory;  
Brahman alone is real;  
Brahman is the world.

The first line means that anything that can be seen is not ultimately the self. Salvation cannot be based on that which is temporary and passing. This is the very basis of the Hindu understanding of *neti, neti*. The second line means that the self, as pure

Witness, or better still, radiant Emptiness, is the only reality, one's true essence, one's radical present and unavoidable, or inherent future. The realization of these two lines Wilber calls causal level realization. The realization of the third line points to the ultimate or nondual completion of the Formless with the entire world. In other words, once it has been fully realized that the manifest world is illusory and that God only is real, then nirvana and samsara can be seen to be not-two. "The entire world of Form exists nowhere but in your own present Formless awareness: you can drink the Pacific in a single gulp, because the entire world literally exists in your pure Self, the ever-present great I-I" (Wilber 2000:189,190).

Perhaps the most important point Wilber makes about this triune teaching is that the pure self, this ultimate salvation, cannot be attained. There is no reaching this Self, for one cannot attain what one has never lost. The self is right here and right now present and fully present to all. *Just this.*

Let us at this time rephrase this teaching about awareness in Christian terms, and so possibly in terms that Wilber would or could not agree with entirely, but fully aware that all attempts at conceptualising this awareness, which can only be shown in contemplative awareness, are inevitably inadequate: the salvation of God in Christ cannot be attained by any human effort. It is a gift of grace that is freely given precisely because of Christ's kenotic sacrifice on the cross, showing us that the created world of form is not the ultimate reality. Only the Father, whom we cannot see (i.e. is beyond all form or reckoning) is real. Yet, in his incarnation, death and physical resurrection, Christ shows that the world of form is that very thing which is taken up into the Godhead. The Creator and the created are not identical, neither are they two. Eckhart (in Wilber 1995:303-305) describes magnificently the process of entering into this profound realization as a directly perceived insight:

Empty yourself of everything. That is to say, empty yourself of your ego [or any sort of separate self-sense, soul, or oversoul] and empty yourself of all things and of all that you are in yourself and consider yourself as though you are in God. God is a being beyond being and a nothingness beyond being. Therefore, be still and do not flinch from this emptiness [but] love him as he is, a not-God, not-mind, not-person, not-image – even more, as he is a pure, clear One, separate from all twoness. You should love God mindlessly, that is, so that your soul is without mind and free from all mental activities, for as long as your soul is operating like a mind, so long does it have images and representations...it has neither oneness nor simplicity. And therefore your soul should be bare of all mind and should stay there without mind.

It seems to me, then, that it is from the insights and understanding gained from One Taste, that Wilber derives his integral hermeneutics, or All-Quadrant and All-Level (AQAL) philosophy. Briefly, all that exists has come or is presently coming from One Taste, and is simultaneously on a journey back towards One Taste. All things and phenomena on that return journey *emerge* invariantly through seventeen or more discreet (with the characteristic of a spectrum) levels of development. The seventeen or more stages can be summarised as prepersonal, personal and transpersonal, or prerational (*myth*), rational (*mind*) and transrational (*Messiah*). In addition to these levels, everything emerges holistically through the Four Quadrants of existence. These four quadrants are the Interior of the Individual (Upper Left quadrant), the Exterior of the Individual (Upper Right), the Interior of the Communal (Lower Left) and the Exterior of the Communal or Collective (Lower Right). The essay, then, adopts Wilber's *integral* approach to dialogical responsibility. Ken Wilber's integral hermeneutics is used as a guide to understanding the many Christian approaches to dialogue. It explores the four dimensions or realms or Quadrants of dialogical responsibility. These are the interior personal or *spiritual* perspective of responsibility to dialogue; the exterior personal or *theological* responsibility to

dialogue; the interior communal or *interpretive* dimension of dialogical responsibility; and the exterior communal, or the question of dialogue and *church structure*.

Important questions arise: what makes up the content and boundaries of these dimensions? How are these dimensions interrelated? Can we begin to recognize and trace how the growth in one dimension impacts on the others in a movement, the dance, perhaps, of our increasing awareness of the need to love each other more selflessly? The interconnectedness of an AQAL approach to dialogue will become clearer with a closer reading of Wilber. We will come to see how interfaith dialogue, in particular, challenges not only one's personal *theological* (UR) presuppositions, but also one's *spirituality* (UL) This impacts directly on one's own community's accepted *interpretations* (LL) of other faiths, which in turn influences the *sociological* (LR) dynamic in which the person in dialogue finds him or herself.

Is it possible, then to both carefully track, and attempt to understand, the development of the dialogical responsibilities of the Christian in these four dimensions of human being? Can one speak coherently of the challenge to personal *spirituality*, its impact on personal *truth claims*, the challenge to accepted *cultural interpretive norms*, and the resultant *sociological dynamics*? In other words, is it possible to work out a conceptual framework, which allows the tension between commitment to one's own faith, and open interfaith dialogue to exist in an increasingly *creative*, and decreasingly *conflictual*, way?

Ken Wilber's integral hermeneutics provides precisely this opportunity, especially in the light of the ever-expanding understanding of what constitutes Christianity's ecumenical boundaries.

### 1.1.5 The Macroecumenical Context (Academic and Social relevance)

We cannot hope to answer these pressing questions without clearer understanding of the broader religio-social contexts in which these questions arise. And it is to these we now turn. The ecumenical Catholic theologian, Hans Küng (1987:783), has perfectly captured the world-wide crisis that gives rise to the need for a holistic understanding of the dialogue between the religions:

Without peace between the religions, war between the civilizations.  
No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.  
No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions.

The world is facing a crisis of meaning, the sheer extent of which is unprecedented, and the religions cannot with any moral conscience retreat into their respective shells. For Christians, there is no discounting the importance, or the size, of the theological task that lies ahead. Theologians and students of religion are called to bravely plunge into the rapids that take them well past the already daunting task of "investigating the foundations" of other religions. They are called upon to exercise so much more than merely their mental and intellectual acumen. They are also required to open the deepest part of their spiritual depths, the very areas that initially instilled within them their faith. Here, they are asked to possibly undergo the type of spiritual experiences that demand that they abandon their characteristic ways of defining what is real and unreal, the boundaries between self and non-self. When this happens, the mystics nearly always speak in terms of a dark night of the soul, the promise of nothingness. Yet, this path in faith leads to an experience of *oneness*, an *at-one-ment*, with the

Divine, and thereafter an existence and a life of faith that refuses to speak of any separation between themselves and others. This is quite often the very springboard that helps them to devote themselves entirely for the welfare of friend or stranger or enemy with equal vigour (Bruteau 1996:269). In this space, dialogue has shifted from being an encounter fraught with tensions, misunderstandings and hidden agendas. It has moved beyond being an irenic mutual congratulatory party. It has become a place where dialogians have learnt to speak the inner languages of their partners' faiths, have become active participators in what Matthew Fox (1988:233-239) calls "deep ecumenism". This is an existential, spiritual and intellectual convergence of faith experiences, and is most certainly not mere syncretism.<sup>12</sup>

What is meant by word "ecumenism"? The Christian ecumenical movement, we said, came about because of an urgent desire to pool Christian energy and resources for the sake of converting a heathen world to Christ. That is, to come together as the "*oikos*," or the household of God, for the sake of Christian mission defined in this narrow sense. Interfaith dialogue, however, has had a monumental impact on this attitude. The acrimonious debates on interfaith issues at the 1975 Nairobi WCC Assembly bears testimony to this fact, where the traditional understanding of mission was strongly defended by appeals to the dangers of syncretism, fears of compromising the uniqueness of Christ, and warnings of the loss of the *raison de etré* of church evangelism and mission. Wesley Ariarajah (1998:12 ff.) traces how interfaith dialogue has changed the Christian understanding of that "*oikos*" from being limited to Christian communities and structures, and even global abstractions such as 'the whole human race' or 'one united church'. The experience of those Christians who have been in a dialogical relationship with those whom they had considered "Other" has shifted the meaning of "*oikos*" for thousands in the church. For them, it has come

to mean all human beings in their relationships to their world, to other human beings and to the very ecosystems that sustain them on the earth. "Being-in-relationship is as much part of our nature as being-in-oneself" says Konrad Raiser (in Ariarajah 1998:17). Our macroecumenical context, or wider *oikoumene*, is a celebratory rejoicing, as it were, in our "original interconnectedness" that existed long before we "became aware of it." Nothing is excluded, then, from God's household; not people of other faiths, not the poor or the oppressed, not homosexuals or women, and certainly not the earth which sustains and nurtures all life.

Deep ecumenism, however, is never without the ever lurking, deep, yet understandable fear and suspicion of those in one's own community of faith who have not traversed the spiritual depths of those souls who have not shied from the challenge to grow because of their involvement in dialogue, among other spiritually challenging pursuits. The process of dialogue itself, especially when one becomes an active participant in the other's religious community, can give rise to these same fears and suspicions within oneself. The difficulties, as we have pointed out, may well lead to a scuttling of the dialogical process itself. Unconscious motivations, personality issues, linguistic differences and religious incompatibilities all contribute to the frustrations of dialogue. Yet dialogue can also be the very experience through which God is able to act with grace and mercy, in order to heal fears and open hearts to God's deeper realms of existence.

Practically, all but the most vehement of postmodern Christians involved in dialogue would I imagine warmly welcome and applaud the introduction of a coherent and embracing theory of interfaith dialogue. This to act not only as a guide to understanding the changes that occur in oneself during the dialogical encounter, but also to understand the criticisms, sometimes vociferous, of members of one's own



community who misunderstand one's intent. Of course, a critical historical synthesis of all the religious histories of humanity conceived along interdisciplinary and interfaith lines would be the ideal foundation for the interreligious, ecumenical encounter, but this would be an enormous undertaking. It is difficult enough to provide a coherent account of even one religion. One need only consider the host of movements and institutions, laws and dogmas that bear the label of any one religion; "Christian" or "Buddhist", even "Islamic".

The encounter of religiously committed Christians with adherents of other faiths in mutual love, acceptance and trust is undoubtedly one of the most fundamentally important tasks of Christian spirituality, theology, shared meaning and shared life today. However, as the bloodied histories of religious conflict make abundantly clear, the "religious encounter" has more often than not been characterised by chronic belligerence, bitterness, and bloodshed. This ought to be particularly concerning for Christians, one of whose central teachings is the loving of both neighbour and enemy as oneself. Christian interreligious dialogical encounters have taken every conceivable – some might say inconceivable – form. These include encounters characterised by hatred of the other because of blood kinship to the Christian clan (magic-mythic level). There is the encounter that is fuelled by a (mythic level) proselytising fury. There are dialogical approaches that are severely restricted through self-defeating arguments, for example, the fundamentalist insistence that all positions are wrong except that of "my religion" (mythic-rational). There is dialogue inspired by self-centred concerns for personal or party-political interests (one possible expression of a rational level dialogue). There is the even the fundamentalist-like insistence that the only allowable position (i.e. no other position is permissible) is that all positions are permissible. In other words, no other position is permissible except my position of

radical relativity (a possible expression of dialogue on the late rational and early centauric level). There are also more integrated, multivalent and developmentally nuanced approaches to dialogue. There are approaches to dialogue that transcend all doctrine and ritual, in a depth of an encounter with the Mystery that defies all conceptualising in the other. The latter are, sadly, enigmatically elusive, even today. The social relevance of this paper is, quite simply, its call for the Christian community to return to a very simple faith. God *can* be trusted in this dialogical journey! It stresses that there are many signs of progress that are joyously anointing our dialogical horizons with hope. There are an increasing number of people who are doing more than merely recognizing the need for dialogue; they are steadily breaking out of the confines of a mythologically inspired belief that bars the road to true *encounter* with the other. Many are now actively exploring and embracing their responsibility to engage in dialogue with the entire “*oikoumene*” in a variety of creative ways. They are able to do so, as I will maintain as the core thesis of this work, precisely because they have *matured through various stages of Christian interfaith dialogue*. Christian interfaith dialogue, like all holons in the Kosmos, have four realms, and like all holons, it has the capacity to mature through the various stages of development that occur in those four realms. The content and context/s of that process of maturity through the stages of development in the four realms of the Kosmos is the central concern of this paper.

Academically, this particular approach towards understanding the growth of the responsibility of interfaith dialogue offers to Christians an enfolding or embracing paradigm that avoids the dangers of falling prey to partisanship. It allows Christian theology to take seriously all the many perspectives on interfaith dialogue without allowing any one to lay claim to being the ultimate or final stage, since all are partial

and will one day be released into the freedom of One Taste. That includes, as a matter of course, even this integral approach. On the other hand, this approach also avoids the anaemia of a postmodernist critique of the grand narrative that destroys the very foundation for discernment and making informed value judgements. On this we shall have more to say.

As always, hindsight offers 20/20 vision. The stages of my dialogical odyssey would seem to have run the entire gamut from what some theologians and students of religion have called the exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist responses to the other faiths (see Race 1983 and D'Costa 1986). Yet, having spent a cumulative time amounting to about a year immersed in the study and practice of Theravadin Buddhism, I find myself distinctly dissatisfied with having to choose one response only and then excluding the others out of hand. I have found that at different times, and in response to different dialogical situations, each one of these approaches has something good, true and beautiful to offer. Moreover, although I shall argue that these three approaches amount to a progression, with pluralism transcending and including inclusivism, and inclusivism including and transcending exclusivism, I have had occasion to work from within an exclusivist perspective when others seemed inappropriate given the specifics of the occasion. Nevertheless, I have been able to explain these experiences from within this integral approach.

This begs the question of understanding my own perspective, which profoundly influences the way that I interpret the world, my faith, other faiths, and the way Ken Wilber's integral approach are brought into relation with each other.

## 1.2 Orientation: Who am I?

"All theology" says Paul Knitter (1985:xiii) "is rooted in biography." This is true of any form of discourse, whether the form of the text be a sculpture, a painting or even the formulation of the most stringently formulated scientific theorem. The very process of understanding a text requires a reflexive circling back upon one's life in order to investigate the influences that consciously or unconsciously inform one's theoretical positions. As soon as one realizes that "there is no escape from subjectivity", as Spiegelberg (in Krüger 1982:37) insists, one is released, sometimes playfully, to consciously and actively avoid the avoidance of subjectivity. Rather, one is freed to show an even greater discriminating subjectivity that paradoxically prevents the place of imprisonment by one's personal prejudices. Experiences long forgotten, favourite film stars and authors, universities attended, all influence the operations of the religious researcher. In my case, being a white South African Christian, ministering in the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, lends its own unique perspective to my study of religion.

As a *white* South African, I share the pain and burden of responsibility for the reality of *Apartheid*. Pointing to my limited anti-government political activity should not be allowed to act as a vehicle for distancing oneself from the past. The fact remains that I do, as do many whites in this country, enjoy the comforts and benefits of a past in which the government's economic policies (which were arguably superior to those of Thabo Mbeki's ANC<sup>13</sup>) were limited to whites only. I was blinded to the suffering of the economically and politically deprived blacks of South Africa. I had refused to acknowledge the plight of the culturally, socially and politically Other. What is so significant for the present, however, is that the act of breaking out of that ideological web, which viewed whites as intrinsically superior to blacks, acts as a powerful source

of moral motivation for seeking out and exposing other ideological strongholds in oneself, one's religion and in the world. The first obstacle, for me as a practicing Christian, is the religious *a priori* that sees Christians as a superior to all defined as *religiously other*.

As a *South African*, I share in the monumental economic and social upheavals that are increasingly evident in our country, as with so many third world countries. The AIDS pandemic threatens the lives of millions. A sea of poverty swells alarmingly around ever shrinking islands of the wealthy, who have every financial reason not to address the economic status quo. Crime skyrockets uncontrollably. Government corruption and its gross mismanagement of tax, land and ecological resources has become so commonplace it hardly receives more than the passing attention of the people and its press, many of whom feel a growing sense of frustration at their perceived helplessness. My experience of working among the homeless street people in the streets of Cape Town, starving township dwellers, and with those suffering with HIV, AIDS and Tuberculosis Milnerton, does not allow me to remain unaware of the presence of the *suffering Other*.

I am also a *citizen of the world*. South Africa is only one country in a world whose cultural barriers are ever shifting, melding or even disappearing. I find myself in an increasingly pluralist and less isolated worldspace of the so-called "global village." Under white supremacist rule, a typically rationalist western culture with a Nietzschean<sup>14</sup> twist dominated, and was safely legitimised by its central symbols, institutions and beliefs - *God, Volk, en Vaderland*. No longer isolated by sanctions, South Africa has opened its long closed borders to the challenges, freedoms and uncertainties of the *postmodern world*.

Postmodernism might be seen as one of several methodologically colourful responses<sup>15</sup> to the pessimism that accompanied the crisis of modernity. In their analysis of the contemporary world of shopping malls, Disneyland, and digital information bits scurrying through the internet's cyberspace, celebrated postmodernist critics stridently proclaim the cataclysmic "Death of the Real" (Baudrillard 1988), "Death of the Grand Narrative" (Lyotard 1984) and the "Deconstruction of the Centre, Origin, Essence, and pure Presence" (Derrida 1976). There can, they say, be no dominant worldview in the pluralistic age in which the traditional, the modern and the postmodern share the same worldspace. This means that the *Other* (religion, race, species, female, male, homosexual, poor) increasingly invades our inner world, and is included through the double coding of postmodern art, literature and architecture, such as that of Charles Jencks (in Powell 1998:78).

Yet, in its anarchy of thoughts and style, in its elevation of arbitrariness and relativity to the status of godlike virtue, can the movement known as postmodernism be the answer to the problems of modernity? Would it not be fair to say that in fact postmodernism itself displays little more than the hallmark characteristics of a late modernism, having only a radical pluralism or relativism to offer as an alternative? "Like a totalitarian unity without multiplicity, so too a relativistic plurality without unity is hardly the way to a better future." (Küng 1995:772). Human beings need an orientation, a direction, and a firm foundation in truth in order to overcome the disorientation so often associated with *anomie*, meaninglessness and despair. Even for self-professed postmodernists, there exists an urgent need for a new openness to the question of ultimate meaning, to trustworthy criteria, values and norms.

The question that arises for all religions: what can they, precisely as religions, contribute in a postmodern paradigm to a truly ecumenical change of planetary

consciousness that speaks meaningfully of an ultimate spiritual reality? For Christians, the issue is intimately involved with the life, death, resurrection and teaching of Jesus, which attests to this ultimate reality they call the Triune God. Desiring to examine more closely this searching question, firmly focused on their own faith, Christians might ask a further question. How can those engaged in dialogue with other faiths ensure that their work remains true to Christ while working with the demands of the postmodern consciousness; non-authoritarian authority sources, decentred centres, non-religious religious narratives, metanarratives that pretend not to be metanarratives that seek to include all others within its OVER/arching and smothe[Ring] embrace?

I exist in this world as a *Christian*. I continue to be spiritually fed, nurtured and sustained by my love for the doctrines and institutions, the community and mission of Christ's church, specifically within the Uniting Presbyterian church of Southern Africa. Out of a deep commitment to, and love for, Jesus' person, comes a clear sense for the need to constantly open myself to ever-new possibilities to love the *Other*. Jesus is never finally fully analysed or understood. Nevertheless, I understand him most clearly in the light of his constant exhortation to *behold*. That is, to *be aware* of the Holy Spirit's presence here and now. Jesus' actions and teachings are a practical means of jolting people into the realization of God's presence which is already in their midst. Jesus required of his Jewish listeners to behold the divine presence in even the hated Samaritans (Luke 10:30-36). This enabled a new opening in their consciousness, an "overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgments, and established conclusions" (in Fox 1988:71). For Christians in a religiously plural world, Jesus' exhortation points to the presence of God in those who are considered as *religiously Other*. The Christian dialogian is pre-eminently one who is being

awakened – sometimes gently, sometimes radically – to the Real Presence of Christ in those who are initially strangers in their (sometimes offensive) religious otherness. The awareness of God's presence pervading all aspects of life has been a part of my consciousness since the age of six. My life as a Christian has been constantly enriched and surprised, jolted and disturbed, by other people and events that did not fit into the religious world as I knew it at the time. The most significant Others have been the sincere and religiously dedicated people whom I have met, and who simply refused to fit neatly into my understanding of what it meant to be religious. My dialogical journey began with a friendship with both Jewish and Jehovah's Witness children in primary school.. A powerful influence on my interest in the faith of the Other was a Jewish friend at university who was clearly comfortable within her active and life-giving faith, giving much cause for reflecting on the legitimacy, indeed the necessity, of religious tolerance, acceptance and, eventually, active support, for other religious traditions. An appreciation for the depth of wisdom to be found in other faiths was kindled during my theological studies at university by teachers whose own minds had long since shaken off the shackles of the pusillanimous and self-assured promotion of one faith above all others.

A more formal phenomenological study of Buddhism was enhanced by a five month visit to the Buddhist Retreat Centre in Ixopo, Kwa-Zulu Natal, with the desire to actively suspend my own religious assumptions (*epoche*) and attempting to probe the *intentionality* of those people who considered themselves Buddhist. The resident teachers at the time were Kittisaro and Thanissara. Through the untiring and selfless efforts this couple and owner/teacher Louis van Loon, I was able, in some small yet existential way, to penetrate into the core teachings of the Buddha on suffering, impermanence and emptiness. I continued my investigation in a more focused way



into the Thai Theravadin tradition in Buddhism and meditation by taking the five precepts as an *Anagarika* into the *Ratanagiri* forest monastery in Northumberland, England, under the resident abbot, Ajahn Munindo. As an active member of the community, I was offered a perspective into the existential situation of the adherents that transcended the "facts" of the faith, into "just this" or "heedfulness"<sup>16</sup>.

Observance of the eight precepts, daily meditation sessions, the celebration of *Wesak* and teachings from various *Bhikkus* all contributed to my experiencing of Buddhism at a depth not possible in the academic situation alone.

Mine is by no means a perfect journey. Many of the dialogical experiences along the way have been deeply disturbing. I have been dogged by the doubts, suspicions and questions of my true motivations, especially whilst sitting in the meditation hall of a religion I did not consider my own. I have questioned the motivations of my fellow dialogians, sometimes from within the spaces of personal paranoia. Dialogue from within these deeply vulnerable spaces is not easy, and for me, seemed unsustainable except over relatively short periods. Nevertheless, these experiences have offered me the possibility of taking dialogue into the centauric and possibly psychic levels of development.

### 1.3 Review of Existing Literature

Recall that our central aim is not the entering into dialogue itself, but rather the construction of a broad framework that utilizes Wilber's four existential realms from within which to trace the growth of Christian responsibility with regard to interfaith dialogue. There has been much literature dedicated to the issue of a Christian response

to the fact of religious and cultural pluralism. The one book that remains as a benchmark in this field is Alan Race's *Christians and religious pluralism: patterns in the Christians theology of religions*, first published in 1983. Race constructs a broad typological framework within which he places most of the current Christian theologies of religion, namely Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism. It finds its precedents in works such as Owen Thomas' *Attitudes towards other religions*, Carl Hallencreutz' *New approaches to men of other faiths*, and Eric Sharpe's *Faith meets faith* (in Race 1983:7). Race's three-fold scheme is widely known and accepted. It forms an important part of this work in that I correlate these theological responses with Wilber's mythic rational, rational and centauric levels of development. However, precisely because Race's work is so crucial to so many areas in the discussion of Christian responses to other faiths, I shall not repeat much of what is already commonly accepted by reviewing his book here. It will suffice that the thesis will hopefully show, among other things, how Race's basic scheme is complemented by a clearer differentiation of the four realms, something that is implicit in Race's work. Race's scheme, however, does not attempt to distinguish actual developmental stages both within these three realms, nor how these realms might fit into a broader, overall developmental scheme that throws light on to why Christians might wish to adopt, defend or leave behind one or all of these positions.

I have opted to approach this literature review in a way that reinforces the value of Wilber's integral hermeneutics for an analysis of the development of Christian dialogical responsibility. I shall briefly review two authors who fall into the categories or levels of development of dialogical responsibility as developed in the body of the thesis. These are the mythic-literal level and late rational or early centauric level of dialogue respectively. The reviews attempt to offer some insight into how the

authors, writing from these specific levels, view their *response-ability* to dialogue or spirituality/faith development, their *response* to dialogue or theological presuppositions, and foundations, and the *responsibility* to their religious community with regard to dialogue.

### 1.3.1 “CHRIST among Other gods”

The conservative evangelical author and theologian Erwin W. Lutzer (1994) has written a book called *Christ among Other gods: a defence of Christ in an age of tolerance*. First impressions are created, as they are meant to do, by the way the title is written, leaving the reader in little doubt that the author is strongly opposed to interfaith dialogue in any form other than as a forerunner to Christian conversion. The decision on the part of Lutzer to write “Christ” in bold face followed by “gods” in small print with no capital letter should warn even the casual reader that there are certain ideological assumptions informing the book that need to be made explicit. Once these are clearly understood, they enable the reader to observe how they affect every aspect of the author’s argument.

For Lutzer, war is being waged to protect Christ, and is being fought by those who accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour defined in the only correct way, that is, the definition of Christian conservative evangelicalism and never that of other religious approaches, such as liberal evangelical, Catholic, neo-liberal or non-Christian. How does Lutzer arrive at such a position? The answer is already evident in the foreword contributed by the well-known conservative evangelical theologian J.I. Packer:

People with no ear for music say it all sounds the same, but lovers of Bach, Handel, Beethoven, and Brahms know better. So, too, people who lack spiritual concern or factual knowledge or both tell us that the world's religions are really all the same, and one is as good as another, so that it does not matter which is yours. They are wrong, however, as Christian clearly see.

The remainder of the book rests largely upon this clear distinction: there are those who are deeply concerned for the spiritual well-being of the world. They are, by definition, those who are informed of the one and only truth that is found in Christ alone. These Christians have the ability to accurately make important spiritual distinctions. They are properly defined as “Christians who have chosen to sink their roots deeper, to understand their faith better, and to turn their faith into convictions [by being given] the opportunity to represent Christ in our pluralistic age” (1994:12-13).

Contrasted with these are those who, by definition, “lack spiritual concern or factual knowledge” because quite clearly for them, all religious music “sounds the same”. This means that, for Lutzer, adherents of other faiths, along with those Christians who advocate certain forms of “tolerance” that allow the Gospel to be compromised, utterly lack any real insight into authentic, spiritual truth. Lutzer does not consider it possible that there might be true, undeceived Christians who think that all religions are essentially the same. There can also not be true, undeceived Christians who hold that Christianity is not unique in the sense of it being superior. Using Wilber's terms for a moment, Lutzer does not concede that faiths other than Christianity might well have translative value (legitimacy) as well as a transformative function (authenticity)<sup>17</sup>.

The acceptance of the basic assumptions are largely assumed of the reader by the author. These are that Christianity is the superior, and only true religion. Not all Christians are undeceived, but for those who are, which means those who are right

thinking and practicing Christians, they are bestowed with insights and gifts of spiritual discernment not possible outside of this interpretive framework.

Understanding these assumptions opens a way for realizing how Lutzer is able to interpret, some would say misinterpret, a Christian approach to dialogue.

Let us examine how Lutzer, working from within a strongly oppositional stance based on these important presuppositions, views his *ability to respond* to dialogue for the sake of his community, how he works out a theology of dialogue, and who he considers his own community of faith.

#### 1.3.1.1 Response-ability

The question arises to what extent we are able to determine Lutzer's *ability to respond* to the challenges of dialogue. We do not assume to be able to accurately assess Lutzer's psychological profile or faith development based on the reading of just one text. Clearly any conclusions drawn here would require an in depth psychological analysis to supplement the findings to render it fully accurate. Yet, one ought not to allow the question of the author's spiritual development go unasked if one is determined to take the text seriously. A crucial means of unlocking a text's secret is, from the perspective of any adequate hermeneutical approach, but especially from Wilber's integral approach, to allow the text to provide pointers to the author's Interior Individual development, with due acknowledgement of the limitations imposed by the lack of other areas of verification.

Lutzer's motivation for writing the book takes its cue from his experiences at various plenary and other sessions of the 1993 Parliament of the World's religions in Chicago.

His desire is not so much to give an overview of the Parliament itself, but to give reasons why Christ *must* be allowed to stand alone, why all attempts to “unite Him with the religions of the world are doomed to fail” (1994:23). Lutzer’s passion is clearly evident as he puts reveals his own burning heart: “Never before have I written a book with such a burden,” (1994: 9) as he recounts his growing concerns at the pace at which the world religions are gaining ground in the United States. What he sees as “the gods” being “on a roll,” is the process whereby other religions are being vociferously propagated, with an intense intent to “unify the religions of the world for the common good”, and to “break down the barriers that exist in the accelerated march toward unity” (1994:11). Whilst the Parliament and the religions it bandstands may seem to be promoting the ostensibly laudable aims of a “global ethic designed to alleviate the suffering and wars of the world” (1994:11), the real question is how Lutzer, as a committed Christian, is to respond to the position that Christ is placed in this “New Age of tolerance”? Jesus, Lutzer (1994:13) insists, is being “desecrated” when classified as merely one among many options, which, in his opinion, is a prerequisite for the unity so desperately sought by the Parliament and the other religions. Just how desecrated Judaism may feel, for example, by this same search for unity, Lutzer does not say. Nor indeed could it ever be a serious issue for Lutzer given his insistence that Christianity is superior thus relegating Judaism to the role of trying to emulate the obviously superior Christian way of life.

Lutzer speaks of three ways of relating to Christ *vis-a-vis* religious dialogue, using Alan Race’s scheme<sup>18</sup> of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Lutzer (1994:20) chooses not to use Race’s very careful and nuanced definition of pluralism. Instead, he opts for his own summary, which he summarises as the “direct assertion that we must accept all religions as equal”. In this view, Christ is seen as only a man or a

prophet among a variety of options. In all of the various pluralist interpretations of Christ, he is always “stripped of His deity,” unless he is seen as being divine because all are divine. In fact, the less the world knows about Christ, the more it likes him since, in Lutzer’s opinion, it is then much easier to make Jesus into something he is certainly not.

Lutzer (1994:31 ff.) is particularly concerned about the current process of an “ideological megashift,” in the world, which Lutzer sees as resulting from the move from a “God-centered” worldview to “man –centeredness. ” This has been accompanied by a the shift from “objective authority” to “relativism,” from “objectivity” to “pragmatism,” from “reason to feeling” and finally the shift in modern society from “convictions” to “opinions.”

Lutzer, furthermore, feels that the Enlightenment brought a mixed blessing. Positively, it emphasised religious freedom and tolerance “in the best sense of the word.” Lutzer defines this sense as a “much needed emphasis of freedom of learning and freedom of conscience.” However, it also brought a “deep darkness” which meant while it was now possible to opt for a “kinder, gentler theology”, it also seriously “obscured” the Gospel of Christ, since “Man” had now become the judge of religion and morality.

Lutzer maintains that the many crimes committed in the name of Christianity pale into insignificance in comparison to the crimes committed in the name of an atheistic view of man and the world. As proof of this, Lutzer refers to Hitler’s delight in setting up his *Buchenwald* death camp just six kilometres from Weimar, a city that delighted itself in its Enlightenment values and history of tolerance. Hitler is the prime example of a tyranny far worse than any Christian religious tyranny ever was, that always arises when “men throw off the disciplines of revealed religion” and opts for the path

of humanism, or a “human-centred” approach as opposed to a “God-centered approach.”

These assertions are extreme. For this reason it is somewhat disappointing that Lutzer’s analysis proves to be woefully inadequate in at least three crucial areas. First, he fails to clearly outline *why* his interpretation of the Parliament of the World’s Religions aims should be considered more accurate than the expressly stated intentions of the Parliament itself. The organizers of the Parliament went to great lengths to ensure that attempts at working towards a common, united religion that ignored the diversity of the many was avoided at all costs, and that joint efforts be limited to finding a common, global ethic, according to one of the principle architects of that ethic at the Parliament, Hans Küng (1991). For Lutzer to contradict this by asserting that the aim of the Parliament is precisely what they said it was not i.e. to create one world religion, one would not be remiss in insisting Lutzer show why he so believes. However, no reasons are forthcoming. This can only be as a result of the ideological positions stated previously and made clear by the author himself. The right kind of Christians are in the know. They have the discernment that allows them to see deeper than those who are being “deceived.” These assumptions thus relieving Lutzer of the need to properly back his claims with evidence, since other Christians also in “the know” will find his assertions quite valid.

Secondly, Lutzer does not adequately acknowledge how the Enlightenment brought to the world the freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, abolition of torture the ending of the persecution of witches, the abolishment of slavery and other achievements, all while the church neglected their function as the moral conscience of society (Küng 1976:29). Lutzer does not define what is meant by “God” in the move during the Enlightenment from “God-centredness” to “man-centredness”. Were not



the God concepts at the time inextricably tied to deeply unhealthy models such as that of medieval Landlords? “Christianity and humanism are not opposites. In fact, as Kung (1976:31) vehemently insists, Christianity cannot be understood except as radical humanism.

Thirdly, and possibly most incomprehensibly without our ideological assumptions as an interpretive key, Lutzer fails to adequately demonstrate *how* Christianity’s crimes “pale into significance” in comparison to Hitler’s heinous crimes against humanity, given of the devastating statistics that still haunt the Christian faith. A selective amnesia about the extent of one’s own historical guilt may be posited as the reason for such a light dismissal of Christianity’s crimes against humanity, but will never suffice for a level of interfaith dialogue that genuinely transcends the mythic level. A very typical interfaith encounter on the mythic level was witnessed by Bartolomé de las Casas (in Fox 1988:25) who recorded the murder of tens of thousands of indigenous people through the seemingly unquenchable greed of Christian colonists. Within the first fifty-eight years of the arrival of Christians on to the shores of the Americas, no less than seventy million people were exterminated through sword, disease and hunger. The sheer effectiveness of the process of ridding the earth of those “irrelevant” people occupying desired lands, which was to sell pox-infected blankets to cold and desolate indigenous American families, was astounding. It might be compared favourably to the effectiveness and ingenuity of the Third Reich’s gas showers, which history shows as having achieved well the Reich’s desire to rid the Aryans of the “annoying Jews” too rich for their own good anyway.

The immediate problem with the comparison is that the latter’s means were not nearly as effective as the former in terms of sheer volume of people murdered. Within the first sixty years of Christianity coming to the Americas, the indigenous population

was reduced from eighty million to ten million. The reduction of the indigenous population of Mexico alone is estimated at twenty four million from when the Christians first arrived to 1600<sup>19</sup>. Add to this the relentless abuse, torture and murder of women by the patriarchal attitudes and institutions of the church on the European continent during the Middle Ages, and one has to seriously question why Lutzer feels the need to so assuredly assert that these crimes of Christianity “pale into insignificance”, especially when comparing them, as Lutzer does, with Hitler’s Germany.

What might we discern in the psychology of the person making such a blatantly ludicrous assessment of his own faith, especially in the light of interfaith dialogue? Why does he make the assumption that the other faiths’ collective aim is to unite Christ “to the religions of the world”, when this is expressly avoided by most interfaith encounters<sup>20</sup>?

Matthew Fox (1988:28) observes that wherever the feminine principle is repressed in the name of patriarchy in a society, religion or individual, a system he calls an “almost fashionable fascism” arises, which is characterised by power struggles, the very opposite of mutual love, support and solidarity. This same competitiveness is clearly evident in many fundamentalist religious groups and church structures<sup>21</sup>. “The authoritarian character who thrives in such a system “is essentially sado-masochistic,” according to psychiatrist Anthony Stevens (in Fox 1988:28), and is compelled to categorise others as either strong or weak. He or she worships the former and has contempt for the latter. There is a need to dominate, attack and humiliate that which is made out to be weak.

However, every sadist has a masochistic side; the bullying adult who tries to free him or herself from having been bullied as a child. Such a person deeply enjoys submission to a leader, God or fate. Consider Lutzer's statement:

[E]xclusivism...maintains that God has revealed Himself only in Christ; all other religions are therefore incomplete, misleading, and false. Elijah, the mighty prophet of the Old Testament, one might call an exclusivist. When he had a contest with the prophets of Baal and they were proven to be false, he took 400 of them and had them put to death at the river Kishon. The New Testament continues with this tradition of exclusivism [which] I might add, does not conflict with freedom of religion.

In Lutzer's arguably fascist form of the Christian faith, certain aspects of his self would seem to have been either aborted or forbidden to develop naturally. As a Christian, this might well be in the area of sexuality and aggression, common given Augustine's attitude towards sex and "Just War". When dialogians are not educated to be their true selves, but to wear false personas modelled "on the demands of the parents and not the needs of the Self," (Stevens in Fox 1988:29).

The person who remains within this mindset often channels these powers of sexuality and aggression into self-loathing and self-contempt. Alternatively, these energies may be displaced onto a scapegoat; racial minorities, women or homosexuals, and, in this case, on to adherents of other faiths. The appropriate attitude towards those whose belief is false, is to bring down the wrath of God on to them as did Lutzer's ideal type or model for interfaith engagement – Elijah. Furthermore, there is often the accompanying characteristic of the worship of an oppressor who is "always right," especially when projected on to a god-like figure or concept. "This kind of energy" says Fox (1988:29)

pervades patriarchal institutions including the church.... When mother church is dying, perverse energies are unleashed. Sado-masochism substitutes for morality; control for prayer; moralizing and condemnation for play and celebration; and self-centredness and pre-occupation with human-made games and rules for cosmic adventure, wonder, and living ritual.

The tentative conclusion that our analysis makes is that Lutzer's *ability to respond* in dialogue is characterised by what we will come to describe as a mythic rational level of personal development.

### 1.3.1.2 Response

Having looked at Lutzer's interior development or psycho-spiritual maturity as closely as we can given the limitations, Let us turn to Lutzer's response itself, in other words, his fundamental theological perspective, dealing now with Wilber's Upper Right or "It" domain.

Lutzer (1994:102) sums up his fundamental theological position in a way that is commensurate with his ideological assumptions:

The deity of Christ rends a clean and unbridgeable chasm between Christianity and other religious options.

The context of this statement is the comparison of Christ to all other "rivals." The phrasing of Lutzer argument is clearly in terms of competitiveness and a "win-lose" mentality<sup>22</sup>. The theological reasons offered for Christ being seen as the winner follow the standard conservative-evangelical methodology of conflating Christ, the Bible and Christianity into an indivisible unity, and defending the entire gestalt with passion.

Lutzer (1994:116) emphasises the doctrine of Christ's uniqueness and his "extraordinary" authority death, resurrection and return. This is the trump card that confirms that Christ himself has revealed that he is the "final and most complete revelation from God," and, as such "gives us the criterion by which all other worldviews can be judged<sup>23</sup>."

Lutzer, however, is not yet done. He then proceeds to confer this same uniqueness and unquestionable authority on Christianity as he expounds on the "gulf of Christianity". He does so seemingly without realizing that he has just placed himself in the unenviable position of trying to explain the complications of having two absolutes – both Christ and Christianity. No explanation is forthcoming, merely a restating of the eternal merits of Christianity.

The chasm between Christianity and other religions now expands into a gulf that becomes as wide as eternity. Even the thought of finding some common ground must disappear...[for] Christianity stands in unbending opposition to any form of the ideas that salvation involves our efforts (Lutzer 1994:118)

What follows in Lutzer's argumentation has become the standard conservative evangelical model of interfaith dialogue, based on the Frankfurt Declaration of 1970 and the Billy Graham inspired International Congress on World Evangelisation in Lausanne 1974. Paul Knitter (1985:79) captures the heart of the approach: "To substitute a 'give-and-take dialogue' with other religions 'for a proclamation of the gospel that aims at conversion' is absolutely rejected as a prostitution of the gospel...[for] if they [the non-Christians] die without knowledge of Jesus Christ, they perish." The basis of this uncompromising theological approach is the strongly affirmed authority of the Bible, the uniqueness of Christ as the only "God-man" and mediator between God and humanity. Lausanne's shift towards a position in which

they purport to listen more sensitively in order to understand the other faiths should not be taken as a shift towards more inclusive, dialogical approach. A recent evangelical statement clarifies the position quite unambiguously. "Dialogue with other religions is necessary because you cannot convert persons without first understanding them...and [thus is necessary in order] to unmask to heathendom all false religions as sin against God..." (in Knitter (1985:79,80).

The particular interpretive methodology adopted by Lutzer towards interfaith dialogue is in part grounded in the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth. Barth (in Knitter 1985:80 ff.) wanted to address in his own time the confusion facing Christians with the influx of liberal Protestant teachings. Theologians such as Ernst Troeltsch were among the first to recognize the reality of religious and historical pluralism, and how difficult this was to reconcile with Christians claims of universality and superiority. Barth also wanted to address the facile optimistic upward mobility so often associated with in evolutionary thinking, the belief that the world would be a much better place in the future because of human reason<sup>24</sup>. Whilst Barth agreed with Troeltsch that all human knowing is limited and historically conditioned, he radicalised this relativity by asserting that humanity could neither really know its own true condition nor could it have any true knowledge of God because of human sinfulness. Humanity had the responsibility to admit its own inadequacies, recognize the infinite qualitative distinction between humanity and God, and accept God's self-revelation and offer of salvation through Jesus Christ.

This Barthian anthropology, that insists that God be God and humans be human, is the basis for his assessment of religion as unbelief. One does an injustice to Barth by attempting to be brief (even if he did choose to entitle his earlier work the "*Romerbrief*"), but it is important to get some sense of the depth and effectiveness of

Barth's dialectical theological method, and how deeply this affects conservative evangelical thinkers such as Lutzer. God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is the beginning and end of all God has to say in God's self-revelation. Only God's Word can say what religions really are. What the Word reveals is that, firstly, only God can make God known.

Revelation is God's self-offering and self-manifestation. Revelation encounters man on the presupposition and in confirmation of the fact that man's attempts to know God from his own standpoint are wholly and entirely futile.... In telling him this, revelation tells him something utterly new, something, which apart from revelation he does not know and cannot tell either himself or others... We need to see that in view of God all our activity is in vain even in the best life; i.e., that of ourselves we are not in a position to apprehend the truth, to let God be God and our Lord (in Knitter 1985:82)

Barth points to the second truth of revelation, the Biblical and Reformational principle of "*sola gratia*," that only God can save humanity. In other words, humanity has no ability to help itself even when they want to. Every attempt to reach out for God to find salvation means that they fall into the sin of rebellion against God. "Religion is unbelief [in which] the divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and wilfully evolved by man" (in Knitter 1985:84). Revelation supplies the answers we normally otherwise seek in religion, and to seek "points of contact" between the two is a violation of the Gospel.

Lutzer fully employs Barth's critique of religions as they are applied to other faiths, but fails to reach the dialectical heights of the great theologian by similarly applying the critique to Christianity itself. For Barth, there are in Christianity all the elements of unbelief that characterises other religions. Christianity is justified not because of any inherent goodness, for it too, like sinners, is only ever justified by grace. Barth, in other words, bases his affirmation of the truth of Christianity on his Christology. Only

as an “annex to the human nature of Jesus Christ” is Christianity made acceptable and used by God precisely because of His own free choice (grace); it is because the light of Christ has fallen on Christianity that the rest are in darkness and falsehood, not because Christianity has light and truth in and of itself (see Knitter 1985:85-86).

We may rightly tackle Barth on the premises of his insistence that Christianity is the only acceptable faith to God. It is unclear how Barth could so glibly speak of other faiths in such negative terms without having truly engaged them on their own terms. However, for Lutzer, there is no hint of him applying any sort of sustained historical or hermeneutical critique of Christianity, let alone the other faiths. For him, Christianity (or more precisely, his interpretation of what true Christianity means) has to be maintained in all its uniqueness. Any attempt to go beyond it in the form so favoured by him is to dilute the power of the Gospel itself.

Lutzer, on the other hand, makes no critical distinction between the uniqueness of Christianity as a religion and Christ himself in his assessment of Jesus Christ as the unique and unsurpassable revelation of God. “Christ,” he says (1994:112), is the “criterion by which all worldviews can be judged” without going on to show how Christ might be viewed apart from Christianity. Indeed, such a distinction is not necessary to make given the premises already established of the superiority of Christianity and of the deep insights it alone contains over and above the other faiths. Indeed, any countenancing of such a distinction would force the question of the possibility of Christianity itself being inadequate in its appropriation of Christ, leaving the possibility that other faiths might offer a perspective on Christ that cannot be found in Christianity. The collapsing of (or more accurately, the inability to make the distinction between) the subject of revelation and the means by which that revelation



is appropriated and understood, is quite typical of the mythic rational level Christianity, as we come to see.

Lutzer's theological response to dialogue, then, is based on his assumption of a full and final revelation not only in Christ, but also in a Christianity that in no way is distinguished from Christ. This Christianity is of a very particular kind, namely, one that seeks to logically show how the Bible is true in opposition to what any other revelation might offer as good, true and beautiful – hence *mythic rational*. It has at its roots not so much the glorification of Christ as the glorification of one particular interpretation of Christ, but without making these distinctions clear. Of course, they are not made clear because Lutzer has not yet broken through into the level of discourse capable of being comfortable with the paradoxes that are inevitably generated when dealing with something of the mystery of the God who “passes all understanding.”

### 1.3.1.3 Responsibility

To whom exactly does the author feel responsible in writing this book? In other words, which is the community with whom the author identifies, and with whom he wishes to share his insights into the issues of dialogue? The book is written, it should be noted, in an attempt to *confront* several different audiences at once<sup>25</sup>, especially liberal Christians. Arguably, Lutzer's (1994:40) fundamental thrust is an all-out attempt to “topple this god named uncritical tolerance” by showing how logically absurd the claims of liberal Christians are in the light of the Gospel as viewed from within his interpretive framework. Lutzer (1994:84) quotes William Temple,

Archbishop of Canterbury with approval: "Why anyone should have troubled to crucify the Christ of Liberal Protestantism has always been a mystery." He feels that the liberal ought to be confronted because they remake Christ into their own image or whatever they want him to be, they have "edited Him, censored Him, and disbelieved Him on every count." (Lutzer 1994:86).

Notwithstanding this need to confront, Lutzer's chosen *community* of faith, the people he feels committed to defend, encourage and uphold, are Christian, conservative and evangelical. What I hope to show in the pages that follow is that, in the realm of shared meaning and interpretation, or what Wilber terms the Lower Left quadrant, or *culture*, this community, which Lutzer upholds and defends, is at the "mythic-rational" stage of development. What is important for Lutzer, then, is to show logically that Christianity is superior to other faiths. He does so using conservative Christian theological categories, worldviews and interpretations that are valid for his level of understanding of Christianity, without allowing other interpretations to influence his at all. By definition, his interpretations have to remain untouched by others in order to retain validity for his faith. Thus, on the one hand, Lutzer wished to logically show that it is "absurd to believe that all religions of the world could be equally right" (1994:46). On the other hand, he uses Christian archetypes and myth, such as those of the "Anti-Christ", the "Battle of Armageddon" seamlessly with other uncontextualised Scripture references in order to present his arguments. This approach is very typical of the mythic rational level of discourse. It is, for our purposes, the very starting point of the process of growing deeper into dialogue.

### 1.3.2 Overview

By choosing to review Erwin Lutzer's book *Christ among the gods*, we are provided with an excellent example of what might be called the earliest stages of the long and very often painful journey towards a more embracing, inclusive and mature attitude towards adherents of other faiths. Lutzer's work has within it all the characteristics of a mythic rational level of development, from what can be determined of his personal spiritual development (the Upper Left quadrant or response-ability), his theology (Upper Right quadrant or response) and choice of hermeneutical framework (Lower Left or responsibility).

Lutzer brings to the overall developmental schema of Christian dialogical development some truly important and indispensable insights and gifts. There are two crucial aspects of Lutzer's approach that ought to remain with the Christian dialogian throughout her or his journey. The first is an appreciation of the radical mystery of God, the second is the necessity of understanding Christ as the "scandal of particularity".

### 1.3.2.1 Radical Mystery

Erwin Lutzer (1994:112-113) believes that human beings on their own simply do not have enough information to know the answer to ultimate questions. This insight is consistent with Barth's evaluation on the human condition of radical finitude, an inability to pull oneself up by one's own "bootstraps." We are saved not by our works, nor our level of spiritual, moral or ethical development. There is nothing within the human person that can save her or himself. All our religious attempts are "unbelief" according to Barth. This correlates well with the concept of the "atman project" used with great effect by Ken Wilber (1980) or those attempts to secure

immortality for the self by inoculating itself against the need to be drawn into deeper levels of our true nature within the Ultimate.

Lutzer reminds us if the real need to come to a clear recognition the reality of the limitations of human sinfulness. Without this admission, humanity runs terrible risks of elevating the self into God, and/or regarding oneself as the perfect expression of truth, which, as such, can legitimately be forced upon others in their ignorance of that Truth which is “so obvious to us”. Lutzer would have infinitely strengthened his thesis had he extending this understanding of self-elevation (what he calls “humanism”) to include the self’s religious beliefs, including his own version of Christianity.

Nevertheless, from this clear understanding of the wretchedness of humanity, Lutzer and the conservative evangelicals are right, then, to first and foremost remind the world that there is a solution to this human dilemma; it is to throw oneself completely upon the mercy of a Power who is beyond all understanding. That Power is a radical mystery, not available to human manipulation or knowing. Its Power lies precisely in its unconditional love for all creation. As the mystery of love, this Power offers something for humanity that is always a surprise. It always offers new possibilities of grace that breaks into the confusion of the human situation.

### 1.3.2.2 Scandal of Particularity

The second point is that Lutzer is quite right to insist on is that liberal Christians need to beware of attempting to turn Christ into something that, being acceptable to all, becomes utterly innocuous and incapable of bringing about the radical change necessary in the human condition. Christian history attests to the fact that in Christ,

humanity does indeed face God who has turned the tables on human expectations and reason. There can be no shying away from the possibility that in one particular person and event, namely Jesus Christ, God has overcome the relativising effects of history and has offered a grace and truth on which the salvation of the world depends. Paul Knitter (1985:89) reminds us that one of the main lessons learnt by the comparative historical studies is that critical breakthroughs to new levels of consciousness occur when there is an insistence on a particular truth that runs against the grain of accepted norms. The largely accepted norm today is the growing insistence that the religions make a vital contribution to a new and united world community. Advocates of religious pluralism all too often suggest that this will be achieved through a relativisation of the religions' more offensive truths, such as salvation through Christ alone. However, by ridding the faiths of their uniqueness, can there ever be the salvation from human sinfulness and limitation, or that change in human consciousness that would see the Kingdom of God breaking through into this realm? Can flirting with relativism alone be enough to break through to a situation in which the One and the Many are taken up into a unitive and healing embrace? Christ is for millions the ultimate symbol of atonement, that unifying principle that freely chooses to elevate the world into new and higher levels of consciousness, into a new personal and communal spiritual integration. Humanity cannot expect to judge the Gospel proclamation on its own standards of fairness, which Lutzer (1994:180 ff.) quite rightly insists upon, since God has God's own standard of what is fair with regard to salvation, and what salvation itself means. If God has chosen Christ in particular to be the stumbling block to trip the world into heaven, then so be it.

### 1.3.2.3 Weaknesses

If the strengths of Lutzer's work are his insistence on the radical mystery of God and the scandal of particularity, then its weaknesses are located, paradoxically, in precisely these same areas. If God is radical mystery, then the inability to fully appreciate and appropriate that mystery ought in all humility to be consistently applied i.e. not just to other faiths or liberal Christians, but also to his own particular understanding. Lutzer, having stressed the "total otherness" of God, immediately proceeds to establish or propagate what Tillich (1957:8) describes as "superworld of divine objects". That is the attempt to understand and express God's relation to the world in a way that views God as "existing" as a "being" above the world. God is believed to literally be an entity describable within the subject-object structures of the spatio-temporal world. Tillich (1948:92) believes that to "criticise such a conditioning of the unconditional, even if it leads to atheistic consequences, is more religious, because it is more aware of the unconditional character of the divine, than a theism that bans God into the supernatural realm." Lutzer's free use of supernaturalist categories allows him to impose his doctrines of Christ, Antichrist, End-Times on to other religions, while allowing the doctrine of grace to be offered exclusively to Christianity. Because Lutzer allows space for only his own hermeneutics, and not those from other Christian and non-Christian sources, his hermeneutic has become self-sustaining and self-supporting. It has formed a complex of mutually reflecting doctrines that allows for no growth, no mystery, and no "scandal of particularity" to trip up its self-assuredness.

Lutzer, then, uses the scandal of particularity attributable to Christ to judge other faiths. Yet, because he has Christ so perfectly understood that is his by virtue of his

doctrine of biblical revelation, Christ can no longer bring something new to his spirituality, theology and community of faith. Even less, can he consider that other faiths might have an equally scandalous particularity, such as the Hindu doctrine of *advaita*, or the Buddhist Eight-Fold Path, which might in turn bring something entirely new to his Christianity. This unidirectional revelational scheme blinds him to his own prejudices and intolerance:

I must remind us that there is no necessary connection between exclusivism and intolerance. Though we must hold uncompromisingly to the essentials of our biblical faith, we should be models of gracious tolerance and humble-open-mindedness" (Lutzer 1994:196).

It may seem quite inconceivable how, apart from his own interpretive framework, the book *Christ among other gods* could be construed of as displaying anything vaguely resembling "gracious tolerance" and "humble open-mindedness." Yet, Lutzer is able to believe this precisely because of the fact that his interpretation vacillates between the rational, mythic rational, mythic membership/mythic literal and even, on occasion, a magic level analysis<sup>26</sup>. Tillich's description of a "superworld of divine objects" aptly describes what Lutzer employs in his dialogical attempts. By using Wilber's categories, we shall broadly define Lutzer's spiritual, interpretive and theological frameworks as mythic rational. A clearer understanding will help us to analyse why Lutzer believes his position is far more tolerant than Christian liberals, Buddhists, Hindus and humanists.

The mythic rational level in fact does display far more tolerance than the purely mythic realm, or the even shallower magic level of blood sacrifices and attempts at manipulating deities. Be that as it may, Lutzer cannot concede that Christians who advocate inclusivism and pluralism might possibly display a deeper, more

authentically Christian approach to other faiths than his own. His hermeneutics requires him to see them as less discerning and less developed than his own, justifying his critique. This analysis, however, would take us into the body of this thesis itself and so we shall leave this issue for now.

Let us end by reminding ourselves of the abiding strengths of Lutzer's approach to dialogue. These are its firm and passionate conviction that there is an answer to the questions and agonies of life. There is meaning and purpose to that which is. Also, it affirms the necessity of a sustainable myth in which one's own identity and faith can be sustained, nurtured and finally dropping that myth as a literal truth, yet simultaneously keeping as an intrinsic, crucial and integral part of one's spiritual growth and dialogical journey.

#### 1.4 *Jesus and the other names*

The title of one of Paul Knitter's more recent works captures something of what has become a life-time concern with Christian approaches to interfaith dialogue, captures exceptionally well the centauric, post-rational level of the Christian responsibility towards dialogue. In Knitter, we find arguably one of the most balanced and integrated Christian scholars of interfaith dialogue issues. We also have an example of how one man's dialogical journey has brought him to what he calls a "globally responsible, correlational dialogue" among religions (see Knitter 1995, 1996). We begin by looking at who Knitter is, as far as we are able, in terms of his spiritual or faith development, or *response-ability*.



### 1.4.1 Response-ability

The same restrictions we encountered with Lutzer with regard to the limitations imposed on a comprehensive understanding of the author's inner world applies here as well. However, in the case of Knitter we are privileged to have a deeply self-reflective, autobiographical account of Knitter's dialogical journey, which contributes enormously to our understanding of not only Knitter, but also our overall drive to discover the various developmental data in the Upper Left Quadrant of the holon of dialogue.

"My dialogical odyssey began pretty much as a monologue," says Knitter (1996:4) as he recalls the days he first entered the novitiate into the Society of the Divine Word. The SVD's morning mantra, "may the darkness of sin and the night of heathenism vanish before the light of the Word and the Spirit of grace" reassured them that they the Christians had all the answers. They fulfilled the role of "doctor," whereas the religiously "Other" remained the ignorant and "suffering patients." Knitter was at the time working from within a Catholic model of dialogue that largely paralleled that of Lutzer's Protestant conservative evangelical model. Knitter's description of his faith, which began with very limited contact with other traditions, bears testimony to a tremendous inner inertia that exists in all that effectively excludes the need for critical reflection on the truth of one's own faith unless challenged and stimulated to do so through contact with those that believe differently. The system of religious symbols and values that form the basis of one's commitment are too often largely tacit, or unexamined. For Knitter, this body of unexamined knowledge formed the basis of his feeling of *knowing* that his beliefs were superior, even without being able to give a

properly reasoned account of why this should be so, leading to a dialogical format that was, as he put it, “monological”.

The close parallels with Lutzer’s ideological assumptions do not escape attention easily. Fowler’s (1981:162) comments concerning a person at the “synthetic-conventional” level of faith bear testimony to the characteristics of a inner orientation of a person at this level. She or he is aware of and clearly articulates their religious convictions, even defends them with the depth of emotional investment. However, they typically have not made their value system, as a system, the object of reflection. The growing recognition that other traditions actually offered “*anknüpfungspunkte*” or “points of contact” that allowed Christians to get a self-serving foot into the door for the sake of conversion, was for Knitter a first small step in recognising positive value in other traditions. Knitter began to realise that the old exclusivist models of dialogue were wildly inaccurate in their assumptions that only darkness existed in other faiths. He learned from his missionary colleagues more about the beauty of Hinduism and the depth and bliss in Buddhism than about their darkness and sin. The “points of contact” that were supposed to provide launching pad for an offensive into the heart of those faiths had, become for him under the tutelage of Karl Rahner a means of understanding these faiths as legitimate “ways of salvation.” The theological and rational encounter with the faith perspectives offered by other traditions was, for Knitter, the catalyst that led him to a critical reflection on how his own beliefs came to be formed, and how “relative” they were to his own traditional Catholic background. Knitter now found himself within what Fowler (1981:174 ff.) calls the “individuating-reflective” stage of faith, or “demythologising” stage. This is as we shall deal with in great detail is Wilber’s (1995:231) “formal operational” stage into which the self emerges as a strongly rational ego from its embeddedness in mythic-membership.

Knitter's self-identity was at this stage no longer sustained by the faith composition, reactions and interpretations of his immediate community. Rather, his realization that other faiths do have inherent meaning and worth outside of his *implicit* Christian meanings and interpretations (Lutzer) was now fully determined and sustained an *explicit* system of meaning that has become his own viz. his new inclusivist understanding of faiths.

Knitter's spiritual odyssey was certainly not over. What became the catalyst for the change, the shifting towards the next stage in his faith journey? Knitter refers to three influences. First, he (1996a:7) refers to an existential, or a deeply personal encounter with the "religiously other." During his doctoral studies in Germany, Knitter met a young Muslim man whom, he felt, ethically surpassed many Christians and was also deeply content with his religion. To speak of this young man's faith as having to be fulfilled by Christianity seemed absurd. Second were the influences of John Dunne's *The way of all the earth* (1972), Raimundo Panikkar's *The intra-religious dialogue* (1978) and Thomas Merton's *Zen and the birds of appetite* (1968), which helped Knitter adopt a method of "passing over" into the faith of the other. This he also used as a methodology for his students in their study of other religions. This became not merely an intellectual exercise, but an experiential one too. Knitter engaged himself in interfaith dialogue itself, particularly with practitioners of Hinduism and Zen Buddhism. Third, he discovered in Hans Küng's (1976) critique of Rahner's "anonymous Christian" an intellectual prod that helped him to shift away from an inclusivist understanding of other traditions towards arguing that Christians should at least be

open to the *possibility* (and that's all I was arguing for in *No Other Name?*) that other religions may have their own valid views of and responses to

[Divine] Mystery; thus, they would not have to be unilaterally 'included' in Christianity. Rather, all the religions could be, perhaps need to be, included in – that is, related to – each other as all of them continue their efforts to discover or be faithful to inexhaustible Mystery or Truth (Knitter 1996a:9).

These experiences and insights into the religiously other helped to bring him to a crisis in his inclusivist position as new dialogical discoveries and theological insights began “unfolding – sometimes exploding” within him (Knitter 1996a:8). This was especially the case when Knitter, to some extent at least, personally experienced and appropriated the Hindu claim of nondualism between Brahman and Atman, and the Buddhist experience of *anatta*, or “no-self.” This, he felt, was better able him to both understand and live Paul’s claim, “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (in Knitter 1996a:8).

Knitter’s move into the stage of “conjunctive faith” (see Fowler 1981:184 ff.) is largely the spiritual gestalt out of which the book *No other name?* Was conceived and penned. Just briefly, conjunctive faith is essentially a way of seeing, knowing and committing that moves beyond the dichotomising logic of the individuating-reflective stage. It is able to appreciate the interrelated patterns of things. The multivalent and complex world is invited to speak in its own key and tongue without being strained through one’s own paradigms and worldviews, regardless of the impact it may have on the hearer’s sense of self-security. In other words, it displays an “intimacy in knowing that celebrates, reverences and attends to the ‘wisdom’ evolved in things as they are, before seeking to modify, control or order them to fit prior categories” (Fowler 1981:185). The integration, embrace and depth of Knitter’s response-ability to other faiths is beyond that of many who seek to dialogue with other traditions, which understandably confuses and frustrates so many of his critics<sup>27</sup>.

However, we might say that God was not yet done with him. Knitter's other important encounter was with what he calls the "suffering other." In a further example of theology following biography, Knitter began to ask how interfaith dialogue is related to liberation theology. This new theological direction came about because of his and his wife's involvement with a local immigrant sanctuary movement in Cincinnati. In a loose partnership with local churches and synagogues, they provided shelter for the victims and refugees fleeing the ravages of U.S. sponsored wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. In "experiencing the pain of Salvadoran friends picked up by security forces and tortured" says Knitter (1996a:10), "became for me not just a 'new method' but a matter of making sense of religion and being a faithful disciple of Jesus."

Along side this growing compassion for the poor and oppressed in society, was Knitter increasing realization that included in the "suffering other" was the earth herself. Since both human and ecological suffering have common causes in the greed, dominion, carelessness and self-centredness of a humanity cut off from its true source. For Knitter, this was something that moved beyond merely an intellectual problem into being a deep, heart issue when he was able to dialogue and commune with one particular religious other – the Native Americans – who enabled him to pass over into the sense of the sacred they find in the earth.

Compassion and an enlarged awareness of the demands of justice, then, became the catalyst for the move towards this next stage of Knitter's faith journey. Fowler (1981:199) says of this "universalising" stage that here, one is able to recognize partial truths and their limitations because one has been "apprehended by a more comprehensive vision of truth. It can appreciate and cherish symbols, myths and rituals in new depth because it has been apprehended in some measure by the depth of reality to which the symbols refer and which they mediate."

Knitter's dialogical journey is truly a story of grace. Through his deepening and widening of self, he was integrated enough to be able to revisit his "monological" roots. The gift of the journey was the ability to finally find out just how effective his faith's symbols were at accessing the power of the reality behind those symbols, the very ones he had first defended as the only truth, then left behind in the journey to new discoveries, but was now revisiting. He was also now able to come to a new appreciation of the truths, the power, the passion and the validity of the concerns of his evangelical brothers and sisters. By dialoguing not just with the religiously or suffering other, but also the Christian other, Knitter, in compassion, and with tremendous grace, was able to include these perspectives into a newer, more comprehensive understanding of Jesus as "truly" the saviour of humanity and the world. In the light of this description of Knitter's inner spiritual journey, let us now investigate his theological response.

### 1.4.2 Theological response

Knitter's dialogical faith journey had brought him to something of a paradoxical position. The longer he engaged in interreligious dialogue, the more clearly he realises how difficult it really was. Whilst there were many similarities in religious experiences and expressions, the differences were far more abundant and, finally, incommensurable.

I have been unsettled, confused, often put off by what the religious Other makes know to me, but at the same time (or soon thereafter) I just as often find myself touched, lured, persuaded by the very strangeness that frightened me...

[This *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum* is] a difference that I cannot comprehend, that sometimes threatens me, that chides or even laughs at my theories... And so I have been experientially convinced that facile talk of 'common essence' or 'common experience' are gossamer theories spun out by academicians who most likely have never felt the hard, obstructing reality of otherness (Knitter 1996a:13).

Nevertheless, the mystery that he found in the religiously other, and to which he could but "bow in silence," was the mystery that fascinated, engaged and invited him to communicate his experiences theologically. The challenge was to listen, to converse, to speak, and to somehow find himself in the mystery of the other.

The response that this evoked was one that came to be formulated by Knitter precisely as a Christian and as a theologian. It was his conviction that in order for his listening, wrestling and speaking ("dialogue") with other faiths to be effective, enduring and transformative, the unnecessary suffering of humanity and the world needed to be addressed in a meaningful and interrelated way. Knitter saw as one of his primary tasks, then, to speak clearly about a Christological, ecclesiological and missiological foundation for a theology of *religions* that would be liberative, and a theology of *liberation* that would be dialogical in that it learned about the combined "potential of many religions for promoting human and planetary life" (Knitter 1996a:16). The central theme, then, of Knitter's theology was to find a Christian theology of religions and of the suffering that was true to Christ and the biblical witness about him.

Knitter (1996b:175) argues that the new pluralist theologies of dialogue, in spite of their many shortcomings and mistakes, are more faithful to the spirit and deeper meaning of Scripture than earlier versions of theology on the same issues. In fact, the Bible not only allows but also requires a more pluralistic approach to other faiths. Pluralist theologies transcend in significant ways the shortcomings of both the exclusivist and inclusivist theologies of religions. Many pluralist theologians argue for

a “literary/symbolic” reading of New Testament Christologies rather than a “literal/definitive” approach. Thus, images such as the Son of God, Lord or Messiah come to be seen as expressions of a community that is inspired and convinced by the example and living presence of Jesus, rather than being seen as definitive, propositional statements about his ontological status in the universe. Other pluralist theologians find a preference for Johannine Logos/Wisdom Christologies that locate the particularity of Jesus within the universality of God’s self-revelation, rather than insisting that the universality of God be confined to the historical Jesus. Still others opt for a linguistic analysis of the exclusive language of the New Testament. Phrases such as ‘There is no other name given to humankind by which we can be saved than the name of Jesus Christ’ are interpreted as being confessional “love language” rather than philosophically dogmatic language. The Biblical phrase “no other name” was meant to affirm Jesus as truly Saviour, and not to exclude Krishna, or Gautama<sup>28</sup>. Knitter’s (1996b177 ff.) provides several concrete guidelines for a pluralist approach to dialogue, such as an absolute commitment to relative truth, the presumed truth of other’s experience and claims, a distinction between faith and belief, and the priority of orthopraxis over orthodoxy. In short, if dialogue is to be fruitful, each should be clear that they have something of utmost importance to say. No one is denied the right to be passionately convinced of their truth as having universal significance for self, the dialogue partner, and the world. At the same time, each dialogian needs to humbly accept the fact that their understanding and appropriation of the truth she or he brings is limited and incomplete. “The degree of our personal commitment (faith) remains absolute; but the knowledge of the reality (beliefs) ever remains limited, relative, changing.” Knitter affirms Raimundo Pannikar’s<sup>29</sup> insistence that dialogue cannot really begin unless each dialogian presumes that what the dialogue partner has



to say, and their religious experiences, have truth and validity. This calls for trust in the dialogue relationship as in any other relationship of any worth. Christians, Knitter feels, ought to be well prepared for this, since the God revealed in Jesus Christ promises to lead us eschatologically into the future of an ever-greater realization of truth. As Christians pass over imaginatively into the faith of the other, they are able to trust that God will preserve them, yet also grow them into deeper truth.

Possibly the most important of Knitter's guidelines, from the perspective of his theological method, is his prioritising orthopraxis over orthodoxy. This is because it captures Knitter's turn from a theocentric to a soteriocentric foundation for a Christian approach to interfaith dialogue. In *No other name?* (1985) Knitter recommended that Christians consider putting aside their insistence that Jesus be the only saviour by allowing for the possibility for there to be other saviours, who, within their contexts, fulfil the revelatory and salvific function that Jesus does for Christians.

A chorus of critics have never been far behind Knitter. However, true to his own guidelines and advice, he has been open to being changed in that dialogical encounter too. In his book *Jesus and the other names: Christian mission and global responsibility* (1996a), Knitter shows his commitment to an ongoing dialogue with, besides the religiously other and suffering other, passionate, yet conservative Christians. How does Knitter respond to their criticisms dialogically?

Knitter, firstly, tries to point out how the name of Jesus can be seen as both truly unique, and as truly saviour. He does so because he recognises that, for many Christians, a pluralistic faith leads away from commitment and fidelity to Christian witness and faith, since it places Jesus (they insist) on a par with other saviour figures. This may "make for a comfortable community of religions, but at the cost of Christian identity" (Knitter 1996:61). Knitter responds to the concerns by reiterating the

principle that theology has two sources; scripture and our human experience, which mutually clarify and criticise each other. Even Protestants who insist on the primacy of the Word need to recognise the value of experience.

The Bible becomes absolute for people precisely because they have experience of the fact that it really does work for them. Therefore, when evangelical Christians insist that the Bible is their authoritative Word, that Jesus is their only saviour, they are making such statements, it seems to me, on the basis of an authorization given by their experience.” (Knitter 1996a:65).

Furthermore, Knitter shows that the New Testament language about Jesus, in their original contexts, were primarily given for the building up, edifying, and strengthening the worship and discipleship of the early, fledgling Christian community. The language was, in other words, “performative” or “action language” (Knitter 1996a:69). Scripture was principally a call to liberating and redeeming praxis in the name of Jesus. The language was a practical expression of a life based on the example and command of Jesus. It was never meant as a creedal declaration of the ontological, unchangeable nature of Christ. Language that speaks of Jesus as the “one and only” were expressions of love and fidelity. Thus, the Bible points to Jesus as truly saviour, not necessarily only saviour.

This overlaps to some degree with Knitter’s second important point; Orthodoxy is fundamentally rooted in orthopraxis. The way to be true to the Christian witness is primarily about the way one acts, and then only about what one says about it. The point Knitter makes hardly needs justification given the words of Jesus; “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.... I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matt 7:21-23). Jesus’ emphasis on orthopraxis is at the heart of liberation theology’s cry that Christians become not only

conscientised to the intolerable situation of the world's starving, oppressed and suffering people, and to the suffering earth, but to actually do something concrete in Christ's name to alleviate and transform this state of affairs. This emphasis on Soteriology changes the focus of dialogue from the origins and doctrines of faiths (as important as these may be) to the goal to which they each strive, hope, wait and pray. The discussion shifts from the past and the present to what is possible in the future, to what all the faiths might do together to bring about a future that benefits all and harms none.

We have seen that Knitter's theological goal has to been to creatively weave together the concerns, methodologies and practitioners of interfaith dialogue and liberation theology. The result of his concern to be true to the Biblical witness of Jesus, his shift from a theocentric to soteriocentric foundation for dialogue, his theological guidelines for dialogue, and finally, his weaving of interfaith issues with liberation theological concerns – with its emphasis of orthopraxis over orthodoxy - is what Knitter calls a “correlational, globally responsible dialogue” among religions.

It is *correlational* because is ought to occur within a genuine relationship of mutuality. This means that each person in dialogue is given equality and respect, the right to speak without the other holding the final trump card, which at anytime can be suddenly revealed to outwit, outscore or absorb all the others. Correlational does not mean that everything that is said has equal validity, or is equally true. This is no invitation to rid oneself of discernment. It does mean, however, that everyone has a right to say what he or she believes to be true. Philosophically, this means that one never leaves behind one's particularity. People view the world from their particular mountaintop. Particularity, nonetheless, does not mean that one is isolated from the other. Having a firm standpoint does not negate the ability to listen and to learn from

the other's standpoint. Here the extreme postmodernists, who insist that all are locked into their own cultural-linguistic prison cells, are wrong. Particularity can and does give a perspective on other perspectives that enriches conversation and draws everyone into deeper truths, provided one remembers that precisely because of one's particularity, one never has access to full and unobstructed universality.

Dialogue is "*globally responsible*" since it takes into account various crucial issues. First, it realises that because there are no theory-free or non-socially constructed facts. There are interpretive limitations to everything we grasp as true, and since history is ever-flowing and unfixed, everyone ought to, in all honesty, accept that there is no one final way of knowing the Truth that is valid for all times and all peoples. The implications of this are that there is no inherent, once and for-all meaning of a text or faith that is given by the author or founder of the faith. There is, instead, only the interplay of a kaleidoscope of meanings to which one is invited to submit oneself to, but not abandon and lose oneself to, in order to truly understand the text. Every faith is limited, and if one wishes to deepen one's understanding of religious meaning, one ought to allow all the opportunity to speak.

Secondly, there is the issue of accepting the implications of the growing realization that dialogue is not an activity reserved for a few monks and academics, but is *sine qua non* for all people who are serious about their faith. Unless we enter into dialogue with those who are different from us, we are lost. Interfaith dialogue is no luxury; it is a "moral imperative", according to David Lochhead (in Knitter 1996:31). In having found our own truth, we need in some sense to be protected from that truth. This is because human beings have an innate tendency to use whatever they appropriate, including "truth" as a means of promoting their own welfare at the expense of others.

In religious terms, each faith needs the other as a corrective voice, as a means of telling each other when the other has become self-indulgent and abusive.

Thirdly, Knitter's approach is globally responsible by being fully aware of those crises, the proportions of which are life threatening to the entire planet – hunger, inhuman living conditions, and ecological devastation. This takes interfaith dialogue into a completely new dimension, opening up the possibility for it to become liberative praxis. This orientation is fuelled by the realization that human beings, among all the earth dwellers are “vitally and decisively responsible for the welfare of our world” and that the “number one item on the human agenda” is “the resolution of the crises draining the life-blood and life-spirit of humanity and the planet” (Knitter 1996:35).

Knitter's response, then, to the issues of interfaith dialogue is theologically summed up in the meeting and integration of those perspectives were, at earlier stages of his dialogical odyssey were considered not his own, finally corrected by a revisiting and reworking of his theological roots. The theologian who facilitates the dialogue between self, the “Suffering Other”, the “Religious Other”, and the “Distanced Other.” This leads us to our next issue of who Knitter regards as constituting his faith community, or those to whom he feels it is his responsibility to speak for with regard to dialogical issues.

### 1.4.3 Responsibility

Much has already been said about Knitter's community of faith, and the journey that has expanded that community from “those like us” to those who are religiously

different or strange, and those who suffer in the world. Knitter (1996:156) highlights the fact that he has himself endorsed Christian theologies that de facto excluded the voice of the majority of humanity. These were the people who were caught in oppressive social, economic and religious structures. They were the “have-nots” and the “wretched of the earth” who, as he grew in his faith, Knitter realized had to be given equal authority in the hermeneutical task of theology. The poor could not be truly part of the community unless they had a voice. Knitter also arrived at the position in his life where he realised that Christian theology could not be just Christian. Thus, he began to make a case for theology itself to become completely dialogical in nature by incorporating comparative religious studies. Theology’s “mono-religious” nature condemned it to being far too inward looking and parochial to truly speak adequately and prophetically to current human experiences of many cultures and religions. “The choice between a ‘monological’ and a ‘dialogical’ theology is the choice between a religion’s life or death” says Knitter, quoting Leonard Swidler (in Knitter 1996:160). Or again, quoting Roger Haight (in Knitter 1996:62) “Religious pluralism is part of the point of departure of a Christology which begins with Christians life and experience in our world today...[and thus] forms an *a priori* context for Christological thinking.” By allowing the religiously other to have a voice, so they move towards being considered by those in dialogue as truly part of one’s own community. This is not in the sense of being an “anonymous Christian”, but as an equal partner in the journey towards interdependent wholeness.

Yet, we see Knitter also not foregoing his communal connection with those Christians who might be counted among his fiercest critics. When Knitter (1996:xviii) began to take seriously the advice not to neglect his evangelical brothers and sisters in his theological approach to dialogue, he was struck once again by their deep personal

devotion to Jesus and a genuine and gentle passion in voicing their concern about the direction which Knitter had embarked upon in his theology. Thus, we see in Knitter a self-identification with such diverse communities as Catholic SVD's, Protestant academics in Germany, a Muslim student, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant church groups in Cincinnati, El Salvadoran and Nicaraguan refugees, Native Americans, Zen Buddhists, and conservative evangelical Christians. This identification he achieves not by minimising their differences, but by containing within himself in a creative way the paradoxes that would normally dissect and tear apart.

Knitter moves and operates within Fowler's stage five, or "conjunctive" stage of development, where he is alive to the paradoxical nature of truth, and so strives to remain close and open to that which is different and threatening to the self. Knitter is committed to a larger outworking of justice, that touches much wider than his own class or religion. Precisely because he has been apprehended by the possibility and the imperative of a more inclusive community of being that extends to even the earth and all her creatures, Knitter is agonisingly aware of the great divisions in the human family. He exists and acts in the space between an untransformed world and a transforming vision that seeks to bring about the "reign" or "kingdom" of God as a this-worldly reality as revealed and enacted in the life of Jesus.

For Jesus, God as God is present and active and revealed in any and all "Kingdom activity" – anything that promotes the welfare of humanity and removes suffering. Wherever such things start happening – wherever there is peace-love-justice and less hunger-war-exploitation- there is present the power and reality of what Jesus understood as the Kingdom of God... Therefore, if there is anything like a "hermeneutical key" ...[or] "canon within the canon" that can serve to order, sort, and even revise the divergent voices that have gone to make up the Jewish and Christian testaments, I suggest that it is to be found in the symbol of God's Reign and its vision of a society structurally transformed through the spiritual transformation and the renewed hearts of its members.

#### 1.4.4 Overview of Knitter

We have in Knitter an exceptionally interesting and, up to a certain point, one of the most complete pictures of the developmental nature of the ability to enter into dialogue with other faiths. Knitter's autobiographical description of his "dialogical odyssey" provides a glimpse into the difficulties and the struggles that accompany this growth. The result of this growth through struggle and through his willingness to expose and risk his sense of religious security and identity to the religious Other and the suffering Other has brought him exceptional gifts. He has, firstly, a spiritual and faith atmosphere in which bequeaths to him an enviably deep *ability to respond* to and transcend spiritual and religious parochialism, thus including and integrating new possibilities, new visions, and new hope. Secondly, Knitter has a theological *response* to the challenges of interfaith dialogue that arises out of his spiritual development and struggle that for the main part includes his earlier positions, but transcends their narrowness. This, in turn, leads to our third observation, which is that the dimensions of Knitter's sense of responsibility now includes communities that are as diverse as they are contrary, or opposed, to one another; rich/poor, Buddhist/Christian, North/South, First World/Third World.

Paul Knitter provides for Christians interested in interfaith dialogue a clear, concise and well-researched typology of the various Christian approaches to dialogue. His theological analysis is a refocusing and deepening of Race's three distinctions of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. He has provided one of the most intimate and personal account of the process of deepening that has taken place internally, in his heart, emotions and spirit with regard to his attitudes towards the religiously and suffering other.



I believe though, that Knitter's account needs to be supplemented in three crucial areas. First, Knitter's approach does not provide a means of articulating the *developmental* nature of the Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue. This, of course, was never a stated intention in his work. However, by interpreting the various approaches in terms of discreet, developmental stages that deepen in a holonic (self-transcending and integrating) manner, one is better able to appreciate the misunderstandings that accrue between their various proponents, especially in terms of the potential pathologies that exist on each level, causing much confusion about the benefits of transcendence.

Second, a developmental approach can assist the Christian towards a better appreciation for the spiritual, hermeneutic-cultural, and sociological processes that lead to the deepening of their dialogical approach. The synchronic relations on each *particular* level and the diachronic relations *between* levels can be brought into sharp relief, appreciably assisting in one's understanding of the various Christian approaches to dialogue, and suggest further approaches heretofore undiscovered. In short, this means that Christians stand to benefit immensely in their self-understanding by, even playfully if necessary, recasting Knitter's work in an All-Level, All Quadrant (AQAL) hermeneutics.

Third, Knitter's pluralist approach tends to collapse within itself what could potentially be a description of the farther reaches of interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue which occurs on the psychic, subtle and causal realms are merely formulated at the centauric level by Knitter, seen from our perspective. Whilst these further levels will not be dealt with in this paper except in the briefest terms, the integral approach gives explicit cognisance to the existence of these levels, which Knitter does not.

We have raced ahead of ourselves. We need to begin at the beginning again, and delve into Wilber's integral approach before applying this to our desire to trace the rise of the Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue.

## 1.5 Overview of thesis Structure

The structure of this work is not unlike an imaginary hybrid plant that includes the characteristics of both a tree and a rhizome. We wish, in other words, to combine the strengths of both while eliminating their weaknesses. A tree lends a strength and rootedness that allows for massive growth. It suffers however, from inflexibility and lack of mobility. Rhizomes have flexibility and reach the far corners inaccessible to trees, but they are easily uprooted and destroyed. Our organic thesis has the root structure of a tree, firmly anchored in the soil. It has the strength of the tree and its ability to bear much fruit. It is, moreover, connected to rhizomatically interweaved, multiple and interconnected branches that move outwards in increasing freedom from a dense to a lighter canopy, taking in the sun, the wide spaces of the sky and the inaccessible corners not available to tree branches.

Chapter 2 deals with our soil, which is Wilber's integral hermeneutics. Wilber's system supports our entire, living organism by providing a *space* in which it can grow and be nurtured, and the *sustenance* to ensure its development into its full potential. Our living organism is, of course, the issue of the Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue. The organism is living and as such it grows. This growth is dealt with in the next three chapters.

Chapter 3 looks at the roots of Christian dialogue. It starts on the mythic rational level, since never before has interfaith dialogue been either a consideration or a

possibility in the archaic, magic and pure mythic realms. Thus, Chapter 3 investigates the very beginnings or foundations of the process of interfaith dialogue, and the Christian responsibilities that this demands. It is a beautiful sight to behold, this wonderful birth of dialogue. However, although it is an advance on no dialogue at all, it is still somewhat in the dark, trying to find its way to the light.

Chapter 4 deals with the burgeoning of the massive and sudden burst of the possibilities of dialogue. On the rational level, interfaith dialogue is truly embraced in a myriad forms. We show how these many forms show many developmental similarities in terms of the *response-ability* of the dialogian (UL), their theological *responses* (UR) their *responsibility* to their faith community's interpretive frameworks (LL), and communal structural forms (LR). This is dialogue in the light, as it were. The branches are still dense, in the sense that most Christians still find themselves at this level.

Chapter 5 deals with the next stage of this responsibility, namely, the centauric level of development. The branches have thinned out, not because there are fewer possibilities for dialogue. On the contrary, for every increase in level, there is a massive increase in the possibilities for dialogue never before imagined. However, since the later levels are more significant (hence, less fundamental), fewer Christians have made the journey to the centauric level. The level may be closer to the light, but it is much thinner in numerical terms than the preceding, denser branches of the rational, and even denser roots of the mythic rational.

Our conclusion summarises what has gone before, attempts to read between the lines, as it were, to find the dissonances and tensions, and the points at which deconstruction may threaten.

# Chapter 2

## Understanding Ken Wilber

### 2.1 The Integral Vision

Alfred North Whitehead (in Pelikan 1990:212) once described Plato as the world's worst systematic thinker in spite of being the world's greatest metaphysician. Ken Wilber may yet prove to have provided the world with one of the greatest systematic metaphysics of at least the last few decades. His recent works have been compared in scope with Aurobindo's *Life Divine*, Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Whitehead's own *Process and Reality*. Huston Smith, in the foreword to Wilber's *The eye of Spirit* (1998:xi), has stated that not even Jung has done as much to open Western psychology to the insights of the world's "wisdom traditions". Though not without his detractors, most would concede that what sets Wilber apart is his ability to provide a consistently coherent system that manages to weave together the most enduring and compelling insights from diverse fields of enquiry; physics and psychology, systems theory to systematic theology, and contemplative traditions both east and west.

What is Wilber's methodology? What influences have played significant roles in determining that method? How might this be an aid to the question of the dialogical responsibility of Christians? Our montage of Wilber's work begins with a broad

overview of the development of his thinking and leads into a somewhat more detailed exposition of what he calls his "orienting generalisations".

### 2.1.1 The Integral Philosophy

Crucial to Wilber's theoretical insights has been his eloquent, enthusiastic and enduring support for the study and clarification of the psychological spectrum of consciousness (Wilber 1974, 1977, 1979). Wilber's driving ambition is to impart a clear and precise understanding of the way consciousness develops and interrelates with other aspects of the universe, which includes all the vast depths of not only the physical, but also the psychological, spiritual, cultural and sociological "Kosmos." This Kosmos is not to be confused with the more anaemic, depth-denying and surface-bound "cosmos" of modern science that has not allowed room for spirit and consciousness in its deliberations.

Wilber goes about his task by firstly relating the study of consciousness with the so-called perennial philosophy. Secondly, he creates a working map of consciousness, drawing from the consciousness exploring philosophies and religions of the world.. Thirdly, he relates the spectrum to the four Quadrants of human being and study, namely the objectivist, sociological, cultural and spiritual realms.

Let us trace this three-fold process in detail, taking in something of the breadth of Wilber's hermeneutical model.

### 2.1.2 Perennial Philosophy

Using insights from the so-called “perennial” wisdom traditions, Wilber (1974, 1978, 1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 2000) finds overwhelming evidence for the validity of a universal and enduring philosophy, known as the “Great Chain of Being”. Reality in this system is viewed as being composed of several different but continuous grades or levels, reaching from the lowest of densest to the highest, or subtlest. At one end of the spectrum is matter, which exists as the least sentient of all things. At the other end, there is spirit. Spirit is given a thousand names or is known to be beyond all names. It is the superconsciousness, or the Godhead-beyond-God (Eckhart). This spirit is, paradoxically, also said to be the all-pervading Ground of all the previous, less integrated levels. Spirit is no further from matter than from its own inner reality. Put in terms that echo Christian Trinitarian thinking, God is within his own inner relational reality, equidistant to all that exists.

The various dimensions or degrees of depth, from matter to Spirit are given a greater or lesser degree of attention by both physicists and metaphysicians, depending on the philosophical, psychological or religious system being utilised. Certain Hindu traditions, such as Vedanta, give an exhaustive analysis of the various degrees of consciousness<sup>30</sup>. These degrees can be subdivided in any number of ways and as many times as is required. Wilber gives an extensive breakdown of this spectrum into seventeen basic levels in *The Atman project* (1980). More typically, the spectrum is divided into five major realms; matter, body, mind, soul and spirit, or just three, body, mind spirit. Wilber usually simplifies this to about nine or ten levels which are the minimum for characterising the overall spectrum and its development. These are: sensorimotor, phantasmic-emotional, representational, rule/role, formal, vision-logic, psychic, subtle, causal, and non-dual. For our purposes of addressing the holistic growth of Christian interfaith dialogue, the realms that will particularly interest our

analysis are the rule/role, formal, and vision-logic, or more the terms we will most often use, mythic-rational, rational and centauric (myth, mind, Messiah).

Called “perennial” precisely because this philosophy is so profusely present across cultures and ages, Wilber finds evidence of this worldview in Plato, Plotinus and Augustine in the west and Shankara, Padmasambhava and Lady Tsogyal in the east. He laments the temporary derailment of this worldview in the nineteenth century, which was so given over to various materialistic reductionisms, such as scientific materialism, behaviourism and classical positivism. Wilber though, wants to show unambiguously that the fundamentals of the Great Chain theory are back in vogue given the emergence of a new cosmology that goes back to at least the dramatic discovery of relativity and quantum theory. The founder of General Systems theory, Ludwig von Bertalanffy (in Wilber 1998:49) says the following:

Reality, in the modern conception, appears as a tremendous hierarchical order of organised entities, leading, in a superimposition of many levels, from physical and chemical to biological and sociological systems. Such hierarchical structures and combination into systems of ever higher order, is characteristic of reality as a whole and of fundamental importance especially in biology, psychology and sociology.

Rupert Sheldrake speaks of a “nested hierarchy of morphogenetic fields”, Karl Popper of a “hierarchy of emergent qualities”, Jürgen Habermas of a “hierarchy of communicative competence”. If there is anything at all resembling a unifying paradigm in modern and postmodern thought, it is precisely this understanding of evolutionary hierarchy.

The single most characteristic element of the perennial philosophy is precisely this notion of a hierarchical chain of being, each level being deeper, wider and inclusive of the previous levels. The lowest levels are the densest, the least conscious, with the

highest being the most conscious and subtle. But this is not to say that when Wilber speaks about the *philosophia perennis*, he means a set of doctrines, beliefs, ideas and teachings that might be elucidated once and for all. Truth, in the sense of ultimate Reality, or Spirit itself, is radically formless, spaceless and limited to no one particular expression of it. "We cannot," says Wilber (1998:59)

make a statement about the *whole* of reality, because any conceivable statement is itself merely part of that Reality, and thus the perennial philosophy, as a direct insight-union with that Reality itself, could never be adequately captured in any set of doctrines or ideas.... Radical Truth can be *shown* (in contemplative awareness) but never exhaustively *said* (in discursive language) all of which are partial."<sup>31</sup>

One can reasonably expect the various representations of formless Truth to change and evolve, ceaselessly. This, nonetheless, is not to suggest that the ancient wisdom found in the perennial philosophy means the knowledge available in the past is somehow greater than that of today. A romanticising of ancient cultures often leads to the belief that in previous times, people were somehow able to intuit truth more clearly than today.<sup>32</sup> The "Romantics" as Wilber likes to call them, are those who see spiritual development as having deteriorated after some past perfect spiritual paradise, this most often being the axial period, which saw the appearance of Zoroaster, Gautama Buddha, Plato, Socrates, Moses, Lao Tzu and Confucius.

The perennial philosophy, as a search for ever more adequate ways of expressing ultimate truth, is at no time given in its entirety. Since the forms in which this truth is constantly advancing, changing and complexifying, one can never hope to know all the forms of truth. The forms are always and only approximations. Yet, Wilber's point is that the quality of the human understanding of these forms is getting deeper, and the forms themselves are becoming more adequate. For example, the idea of all things



existing as a graded level of the manifestation of Spirit is very ancient. However, the idea that we are all evolving towards Spirit, not devolving away from Spirit, can only be traced back a few hundred years in any adequate form.<sup>33</sup> Past truths can and do find a limited place in present understandings of truth, yet in an adapted and integrated way that allows for a broader, more comprehensive framework. Each developmental stage is adequate, but each successor more adequate.

Already then, the process of how to include yet transcend each level of dialogical development is becoming clearer. Particular individuals who wish to find transcendence are not required to wait for the future evolution of society. Any person is free to pursue Truth, which, being timeless and formless is perfectly available in the present, via her or his own contemplative-meditative practice. But as “consciousness on the whole continues to evolve and develop, in a now planetary fashion, ...global awareness (which is a transcendence of any narrow parochialism) becomes increasingly easier, more obvious, more appealing - and therefore, I believe, more likely” (Wilber 1998:66)

There have been good reasons for Christians being wary of hierarchically inclined perennial philosophies given the abuses to which they have been called upon to justify in the past. However, Wilber offers an approach that is truly integral. It avoids both the unhealthy emphasis on only the ascending, or only the descending arms of the evolutionary process that inevitably results in distortions. The approach is truly holarchical.

### 2.1.3 Holarchy

The central claim of the perennial philosophy is that individuals are able to evolve towards Spirit, perfection or the Godhead in order to realize their Supreme Identity<sup>34</sup> with that ultimate reality, however conceived. We are, however, unable to continue until we have dealt with possibly the severest criticisms of all Idealist philosophies — that is — the attack on the core Idealist tenet of *hierarchy*. The problem with all hierarchies, it is maintained, is that they encourage a ranking, or dominating hegemony that tends to marginalize the earlier stages of the ranking. Instead of hierarchy, the preference is for a gentler, more egalitarian and pluralistic heterarchy which see all components as having equal value, thus circumventing the very root of oppression, injustice and social domination. These scholars, many of whom are influenced by postmodern linguistic studies, very often appeal to the new physics and "web of life" sciences to support their egalitarian theses. Ironically, the very sciences to which they appeal insist that one cannot have wholeness without hierarchy. Wilber (1995:15f & 1998:39f) maintains that there is some confusion over the actual meaning of hierarchy, and that is critical to distinguish not only between normal and pathological hierarchies, but also normal and pathological heterarchies. He does so by exploring the notion of holons.

### 2.1.3.1 Holons

St Dionysius the Areopagite is reputed to have introduced the concept of hierarchy, which referred to the nine celestial orders, with the Seraphim and Cherubim on top going down to the angels. Among other things, these levels represented ever-greater levels of knowledge and virtue that were accessible to contemplative awareness.

*Hiero* means holy, and *arch* means governance. Thus, each level was ranked

according to its inclusivity and embrace. According to many current systems theories, as well as many psychological and biological studies, a hierarchy is a system with which to grade structures according to their holistic capacity. Any developmental sequence, what is complete at one level becomes a part of the next, higher or deeper level. The whole becomes a part of a more complex, inclusive and wider whole. Consider Roman Jakobson (in Wilber 1995:17) on language:

The phoneme is a combination of distinctive features; it is composed of diverse primitive signalling units that can itself be incorporated into larger units such as syllables and words. It is simultaneously a whole composed of parts and is itself a part that is included in larger wholes.

That which is a whole in one context, and is simultaneously a part in another is termed a *holon*, or a whole/part. "Reality" says Wilber (1995:33) is not composed of things or processes; it is not composed of atoms or quarks; it is not composed of wholes nor does it have any parts. Rather, it is composed of whole/parts, or holons." A normal hierarchy, or "Holarchy". This is, as we have seen, very simply an order of increasing holons, moving towards ever increasing integration. The whole is always more than the sum of the parts precisely because it provides the means by which the parts are held together. Without this principle, one would be left with isolated parts, or only "heaps" instead of "wholes".

The very common charge that hierarchies are "linear"<sup>35</sup> misses much of the complexity of the interdependence within the system. The fact is that, by their very nature, hierarchies are asymmetrical. Growth always occurs in stages from less complex to more complex. One cannot have sentences before the development of words. There are first cells, then organs, then organisms. This sequence cannot and does not occur from more complex to less.

The growth of holons, then, occurs in stages and of necessity, and holons unfold sequentially. It follows that the more holistic patterns appear later in development since they have to await the emergence of the various parts that they will eventually integrate or unify (Wilber 1995:20). To accuse a holistic thinking of arrogantly and heartlessly ranking one above another is nonsensical. This is not to say, however, that pathologies do not occur in holarchies.

#### 2.1.4 Pathology

The interrelations that exist between these levels are accurately described as a set of nested, concentric spheres within each other. Between the levels, then, there is holarchy, but on each level, one finds heterarchy. That is, on every level there are elements that all contribute more or less equally to the balance of that level's wholeness. Every word contributes to an understanding of the whole sentence. However, a *pathology* on one level can reverberate throughout the entire system. For example, in psychoanalysis, a shadow is that holon that refuses to be integrated into the whole psyche. In critical social theory, an ideological holon that posits itself as the one and only way distorts open communications. In medicine, the cancerous holons usurp the place of healthy cells.

Following Riane Eisler, Wilber (1995:22) distinguishes between domination and actualisation hierarchies. *Domination hierarchies*, as the name suggests, implies the use of force to maintain order, achieve harmonization of the system and reach goals. Human hierarchies based on force tend to inhibit personal creativity, resulting in “social systems in which the lowest (basest) human qualities are reinforced and humanity’s higher aspirations (traits such as compassion and empathy as well as

striving for truth and justice) are systematically suppressed.” *Actualisation*

*hierarchies* are those that function to maximize the system's potential. In every case of a recognized pathology, the solution does not reside in condemning holarchy, but in recognizing, arresting and integrating the “arrogant” holon so that an actualisation, and not a domination, hierarchy is the result.

An important further distinction needs to be made between pathological hierarchies and pathological heterarchies. The first implies a breakdown between levels when one particular holon tends to dominate others. It assumes it is only a whole, not a part. The second suggests a problem within a particular level. The holon loses its identity in its surroundings. It assumes it is a part only, not also a whole. In this way its own intrinsic worth is lost as it becomes little more than instrumental in another's use.

Pathological heterarchy means “not union but fusion; not integration but indissociation” (Wilber 1995:24). Value and identity is equalized, homogenized and therefore, lost. Dominance and fusion; pathological agency and pathological communion. Both extremes will find themselves undercut when the system balances into a stable holarchy.

Already Wilber's analysis begins to clear the way forward for identifying those trends within the Christian dialogue with the religions that lean towards a type of dialogical fascism with one perspective dominating the many, and others that tend towards a dialogical totalitarianism, with the many dominating the one. Identifying which dialogical approaches show pathological tendencies will be both interesting as well as useful for determining how they might be encouraged to adopt a more holistic, balanced approach. Two examples will suffice for now. Erwin Lutzer's dialogical approach that refuses to acknowledge the more holistic and integrated approaches is

strongly suggestive of a dialogical holon, on the mythic rational level (a level that we will examine in depth), that is *hierarchically* pathological. Its aggressive stance has a tendency to want to dominate the other approaches so it alone is the only acceptable approach. Karl Rahner's dialogical concept of the "anonymous Christian", on the other hand, tends to be a *heterarchical* pathology, on the rational level of dialogue (also a level that we will investigate later), since it threatens to assist in the loss of religious identity. Is it possible, then, to find a Christian dialogical approach that recognizes and embraces a universal pluralism without being afraid to acknowledge its own very specific commitments to Christ and church? It is possible provided we do not fall into thinking it can be done without acknowledging the *framework* in which we choose to work.

## 2.2 Acknowledging Frameworks

It is not difficult to have a certain amount of empathy for the motivations of those theorists who feel that ranking of any sort inevitably leads to some form of social oppression. Translating stages of contemplative awareness into purely political structures of power is not limited only to the Catholic Church. These kinds of reductionist strategies do tend towards domination hierarchies based on force and compliance. In response to this, the postmodern world has seen a strong shift towards a heterarchy that embraces a radical pluralism, which, in emphasizing equal values, is perceived to be more egalitarian, more compassionate. Often, the pluralistic view is then contrasted with those that clearly acknowledge their own ranking. In addition, this comparison is normally undertaken without any distinction being made between

domination and actualisation hierarchies. Their view, very simply, rates heterarchy as being much better than hierarchy, yet still insists that all views are equal.

In his *Sources of the self*, Charles Taylor (in Wilber 1995:26) has traced the rise of value judgments that deny that they are value judgments. He points out that it is utterly unavoidable for people to make "qualitative distinctions," since we find ourselves without exception in various contexts, or frameworks. And these contexts are within contexts forever (holons within holons). These contexts, in turn, by their very nature "constitute various values and meanings that are embedded in (every) situation". Those who opt for the most radical of pluralisms do so out of a sense of benevolence, out of a belief that their position is somehow better than other less embracing positions. This is a value judgement. When theorists deny their own value judgments, which is in essence what denying having a hierarchical framework really is, then they are forced into a "strange pragmatic contradiction, whereby the very goods that move them push them to deny or denature all such goods...(making them) morally superior in a universe where nothing is supposed to be superior". The position is clearly incoherent and often leads to a state of aggressive polemics that helps to hide the self-contradictory nature of the philosophical position.

A brief example of a Christian theological approach to dialogue that has developed in the face of pluralism and that tends towards egalitarian thinking, is that of George Lindbeck (1984) under the influence of the philosophy of Clifford Geertz (1973). This approach is characterised by the dominating theme that each religious community is constituted by its own cultural-linguistic system. Everything within that system, whether it is doctrinal or ritualistic, finds meaning only within that system, and not outside of it. Every aspect refers, not to some independent reality outside of the system, but only interdependently to all the other elements within it.

The value of Lindbeck's thinking is that it cautions against the search for a common religious essence outside of the cultural-linguistic system of each religion. This is both impossible, and undesirable. We are tasked to live with differences. Also, one cannot pronounce one's own faith as superior to another based only upon one's own cultural-linguistic system: "Christ is Lord" makes sense to Christians and those schooled in its language games, but not necessarily outside of these. The difficulty, of course, is that Lindbeck has criticised the attempt to find an Archimedean point from which to view all the faiths external to their own, self-circumscribed cultural and linguistic norms. Lindbeck, however, has sneaked in his own transcendent perspective, which is his cultural anthropological reading of religions (the domain of Wilber's Lower Left Quadrant). Lindbeck merely privileges one Quadrant and reduces all the others to it. He takes the findings from this discipline and offers it, not as one perspective among others but as the basis for making value judgements on the correctness of the traditions. In addition to this, he has made the error of privileging only one particular level within that Lower Left Quadrant, namely, the centauric level, and nothing beyond. Our reference to levels and Quadrants is somewhat premature at this stage, and we shall explain them in a moment. Suffice it to say that the mystical traditions of many religions, Christian, Buddhist, Judaic and Sufi, point to a realm of experiences that is clearly *non-linguistic* or better still, trans-linguistic, in that they transcend the ability to describe the reality found there. This reality, which transcends the restrictions of language, represents the deepest part of these faiths. D.T. Suzuki (1969:67-68) says of Zen:

It is not the object of Zen to look illogical for its own sake, but to make people know that logical consistency is not final, and that there is a certain transcendental statement that cannot be attained by mere intellectual cleverness. The intellectual groove of "yes" and "no" is quite accommodating



when things run their regular course, but as soon as the ultimate question of life comes up, the intellect fails to answer satisfactorily... In accordance with the demands of our inner life, therefore, Zen takes us to an absolute realm wherein there are no antitheses of any sort.

Zen does deny the intellect or the importance of morality. This would lead to “sheer wantonness”. It is, rather, that Zen frees the intellect from the restrictions and conditions of the rational mind, finding certainty in that which is far more immediate than language. This place of absolute knowing, or to put it in terms with which the Christian would be comfortable, this “place” where God is known through unknowing, is available to Lindbeck to experience provided he adopts the injunction to undertake the spiritual practice offered, so that he might be *shown* this reality in contemplative knowing. Lindbeck cannot expect the faiths to give up this ultimate knowing simply to fit into his web-of-life scheme, or simply to accommodate the demands of dialogue at the centauric level.<sup>36</sup>

The point quite clearly is that frameworks, holons within holons, are inescapable. In addition, since frameworks by their very nature involve qualitative distinctions, there ought to be no pretence that one is able to work without value judgments, believing that everything that presents itself as truth is necessarily so. The perennial philosophy, according to Wilber, offers a “science of hierarchy,” one that understands why it makes the value judgments that it does. We shall need to examine this framework in some greater detail by asking how holons evolve through the four realms of existence identified earlier; the spiritual, theological, interpretive and social dimensions.

To sum up then: Wilber’s interpretation of the perennial philosophy explicitly acknowledges its hierarchical stance by declaring that qualitative distinctions are unavoidable. It certainly agrees with the broad conclusions of the proponents of

cultural diversity that pronouncements cannot be made on the rightness or wrongness of another tradition whilst viewed from within another at the same level. Yet, it strongly claims the right to make qualitative distinctions based on a holistic, structural-developmental basis that posits the increasing adequacy of the ability of faiths to make these distinctions based on the growth/depth/embrace of faiths through invariable deep structures. A universal pluralism is better than a power-hungry, self-serving dominator hierarchy! Yet, a universal pluralism is not the ultimate point in the development of self and systems. It has not yet reached the subtle, causal realms, and not yet recognized the presence of One Taste in its own immediate awareness.

### 2.2.1 Interior and Exterior

Even the most cursory study of the historical developments of human knowledge shows that scholars have generally followed two broad approaches, which we might call objectivist and subjectivist respectively. While this may seem an obvious distinction to make, Wilber cautions that the sciences have a marked tendency to reduce the one into the other. In this section, we limit our discussion to the objectivist and subjectivist approaches in theology only.

The objectivist methodologies, as the name suggests, begin with certain empirical or material facts in order to give an account for their doctrine transcendent realities. Theologians such as the Deists, influenced by the sciences of the day, used the “argument from design” in order to draw conclusions about the existence of an overarching Designer. Included in this general approach would be the more recent and quite popular “Anthropic principle” (see Barrow and Tipler 1986) showing how the

universe has been following powerful lines or fields of attraction – a relentless pressure, as it were – towards the creation of a fully self-conscious humanity. Liberation theologies may be thought of as employing objectivist methodologies as they begin with the existential realities of oppression and suffering, then moving towards the *Kairos* – the redeemed and liberated situation found in Christ. In its extreme form, this theory results in one that speaks of emanations that recede from the Great Origin. One of the most famous proponents of this approach is, of course, Aquinas, with his argument for the existence of God. Aquinas (in Pelikan 1990:527) suggests that “as all the perfections of Creatures descend in order from God, who is the height of perfection, and should begin from the lower creatures and ascend, by degrees, and so advance to the true knowledge of God.”<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, the influence of the objectivist approach in theology has been tremendous, and its importance is not to be underestimated, but, indeed, to be celebrated. However, in purely objectivist terms, God will always be Wholly Other. The tendency of the approach is to place Ultimate Reality into a kind of theological ghetto that results in its being utterly unapproachable, entirely unknowable. How then, has theologians corrected the imbalances that result from the objectivist approach to God alone?

Subjectivist theorists and theologians begin not with quantifiable observations, but with the immediacy of consciousness itself.. That which is immediately given in lived awareness is primary - the Presence of God, or Suchness, introspection or intentionality. Instead of a leaning towards transcendence, this theology is geared toward immanence. Some of the philosophical roots of this approach lie in Greek metaphysical thinking. Plotinus (in Pelikan 1990:529) sees God as "not external to anyone, but is present with all things". Plato's philosophy may initially seem to support the notion of an untouchable God since he felt that the world of sense

perception is a shadowy cave that supported dark reflections only of the real world of Ideas. Nonetheless, Plato also strongly insisted that every aspect of the world of emanations is a sign of "Plenitude" of God. In contrast to Aristotle, Plato insisted that an Absolute who could not create a world would be inferior to one whose creativity flowed out abundantly into the manifest world of form. Everything on earth, then, needed to be seen as the visible, sensible God.

This seemingly intractable dualism between the objective and subjective, between the exterior and the interior, found its way into practically every area of Western thought; essence and form, mind versus body, morality against nature, transcendence and immanence, the sacred and the profane.

In philosophy, the classical divide between Aristotle and Plato became manifest in the very different routes that characterized the ocean of difference between Anglo-Saxon and Continental philosophers. The former inherited the empirical analytical route proposed by John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume and refined by GE Moore, Bertrand Russell and early Wittgenstein. Knowledge of the world, they all proposed in their own way, was immediate, with sense data impressing themselves upon the *tabula rasa* of the mind. The five senses were the building blocks of our knowledge of the world. Sense data were the "atoms" that made up the world of knowledge.

Across the Atlantic they sailed a different route altogether. Using Plato as the port of departure, the continental rationalists declared all knowledge to be mediated knowledge. Immanuel Kant's *Critiques* followed the line of reasoning found to some extent in Descartes, Schelling, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel through to Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida. The so-called "empirical" world was not only a perception, but also an interpretation. Knowledge was mediated by innate or learned structures that

needed to be investigated and revealed, and then placed within intersubjective contexts and backgrounds (social, psychological, cultural) that actually governed what could actually be seen and experienced in the first place. The type of question asked determined to a large extent the possibilities of the answer. This was, they insisted, because the question was dependent on the particular contexts within which the questioner existed.

A brief look at some other disciplines to drive the point home: in psychology, the objectivist approach resulted in behavioural studies, while the subjectivist lead to schools such as psychoanalytical, Gestalt and Jungian psychology. In sociology, instead of merely trying to explain and describe social phenomena, the subjectivist school tried to understand social phenomena from within. Hermeneutic and phenomenological sociologists such as Clifford Geertz and Charles Taylor are the inheritors of Heidegger's ontology and Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. These theorists, in turn find their roots in Dilthey and Schleiermacher. Lastly, the Christian mystics have not hesitated to use either approach in their attempts to explain their interior illuminations. Evelyn Underhill (in Pelikan 1990:531) has shown that Meister Eckhart, Juliana of Norwich, Dionysius the Areopagite and Catherine of Sienna have all used language appropriate to either approaches to express their experiences of God.

The persistence of both these approaches through so many disciplines is informative. Clearly, both are profoundly significant and that any theory that ignores one for the sake of the other is bound to be incomplete. Wilber (1995:109) quotes Teilhard's comments in this respect:

Things have their within. I am convinced that the two points of view require to be brought into union, and that they soon will unite in a kind of

phenomenology or generalized physic in which the internal aspect of things as well as the external; aspect of the world will be taken into account. Otherwise, so it seems to me, it is impossible to cover the totality of the cosmic phenomenon by one coherent explanation.

Wilber's integral hermeneutic makes a conscious effort to incorporate both the objectivist and subjectivist take on God, human development and consciousness.

While this dualism may seem to be perfectly intractable philosophically to many, Wilber (1998:84 ff.) suggests that there is a very simple yet radical and compelling solution to the absolute/relative dilemma, namely, *nondualism*. However, before looking at this, let us consider further the structures of Wilber's integral approach.

## 2.2.2 Interiority/Consciousness

The study of evolution, having had its origins in biological studies, has tended to focus on the empirical, observable facts of evolution, leaving out the interiority of the holons it tried to circumscribe. Feelings, symbols and ideas, when discussed, were subject to the same empirical analysis used for the holon's exteriors. Many theorists<sup>38</sup> that purported to be holistic utterly neglected to take into account the reality of consciousness, in terms that describe consciousness itself, leading to the "cosmos" instead of the "Kosmos"(Wilber 1995:110).

It is perfectly true that all holons share certain basic characteristics. These characteristics Wilber has summarized in his "twenty tenets". These tenets are fundamental to all holons, including the least developed. However, since they are the most *fundamental*, they are also the least *significant*. Holons emerge, which means that on each new and deeper level, something is added to the whole on that level, something that is new and unexpected. This is the holon's characteristic of creative

emergence, self transcendence, differentiation or increasing complexity that bequeaths to that holon significance. In evolutionary terms, life comes to be injected into a holon, enabling it to do things that its predecessors were unable to do, like reproduce itself sexually. Likewise, when consciousness is injected into the holon, it is able to do things its forerunners can know nothing about, such as do math, or write a thesis, or pray. These new capacities give life *significance*, but if they did not arise, or if they were lost through nuclear destruction, for example, life would in fact continue, even if at lower holarchical levels. Eating food and drinking water are *fundamental* for life to continue. Without these activities, life would simply cease to exist. They are, however, not as significant for life. Wildebeest eat grass and drink water in the veld, but they do not pray to God: more fundamental, less significant. The point of this for us is that as the holon of dialogue emerges through its levels, dialogue becomes more significant for humanity, it is qualitatively better to dialogue at the centauric level than at the mythic rational, as we shall see. However, there can be no skipping of the mythic rational level, since it is more fundamental than the centauric level, thus is foundational for the higher levels.

We are getting ahead of ourselves. The key issue for Wilber is that consciousness itself is not merely tagged on to the end of a developmental sequence; matter - body - consciousness, like a step-ladder to higher shelves. It is rather that each of these aspects develops within their own separate, yet interrelated domain. Each stage of development has its corollary within the other realms, but each is not reducible to without remainder to another realm. These points need further clarification.

### 2.2.3 Four Existential Realms

In *Up from Eden* (1980) Wilber builds on the foundational works of Jean Gebser (1985) and Jean Piaget (1977) in mapping out four major epochs of human evolution that correspond to, and are anchored in, the structures of individual consciousness. Gebser calls these levels the archaic, magic, mythic and mental, and Wilber has used these terms, among others, to both refer to his stages and to show how holons develop through these levels. However, holons have more than just consciousness. They have, as we have shown, both an individual and a social aspect. The individual aspect of the holon generates its own very specific and very different sense of space-time, law and morality, cognitive style, self-identity, drives and motivations, types of religious experience and, of course personal pathologies. The social aspect of the holon also displays levels of development. These social levels correspond with these individual structures. Thus, the worldviews generated at each stage of development – archaic, magic, mythic and mental worldviews – correspond with the individual structures. Magic correlates with preoperational thought, mythic with concrete operational thought and mental with formal operational thought (we will be examining these in some detail later).

Holons, then have individual and social aspects. They have interior and exterior aspects. All these aspects can and must be correlated but not confused. Correlating individual and social, interior and exterior, means that evolution has, in fact, four different strands; the interior and exterior of the individual and the interior and exterior of the social.

The development of a holon's individual exterior form is easily recognized: this ranges from atoms to molecules, cells to organisms and ending in triune-brained neural organisms. The development of a holon's social exterior form is also well-



known, ranging from planets to ecosystems, groups/families to villages, nation-states to the global village, or planetary systems. The interior of the individual organism develops from sensation and impulse to concept, concrete and formal operational thought to yet further and higher stages. Finally, in human evolution, the interior development of the social sees a growth of ever deeper and encompassing worldviews; magic, mythic, rational, and higher.

## 2.2.4 Four Quadrants

Wilber, especially in his *Sex, ecology and spirituality* (1995) goes into enormous detail about how the four realms interrelate. For our purposes, we employ his basic methodology without being too caught up in his substantially researched data.

Consider the diagram *Annexure 1* (from Wilber 1995:193). The upper half of the diagram represents the developmental stages of *individual* holons, the lower, *communal* holons. The left represents how the holon looks from within, the right, from the outside. This gives our four Quadrants.

The Upper Right (UR) is the exterior structure of the individual holon running from the centre, which, for all intents and purposes, represents the Big Bang. Sub atomic particles develop through various stages to triune-brained organisms. The Upper Left (UL) is the interior form of the individual with each level corresponding with successive points on the right. With reference to human beings, the UL contains all the interior individual sciences, from psychoanalysis to phenomenology, mathematical theory<sup>39</sup> to spirituality. Individual holons, on the other hand, only exist in relational exchange with other holons of a similar depth<sup>40</sup>. This means that every point on the upper half has its correlate in the lower.

The Lower Right Quadrant (LR) sees the social organization that exists for each level of the exterior forms of holons. Matter has organized itself from the Big Bang into super clusters and galaxies, stars to planets. On earth, life sees itself organized from the very basic prokaryotic Gaia system, to much more complex ecosystems. Human beings organize themselves into deeper and more inclusive social patterns, kinship tribes, villages, and nation-states to planetary systems.

The Lower Left (LL) deals not with behavioural patterns, but rather with the interior of social systems. This means the shared values, worldviews and culture of holons at each particular social developmental level.

An interlude in our discussion at this time: it would take us too far out of the limits and parameters we set for ourselves in this chapter were we to show how Wilber relates every stage to one another across the four Quadrants. Our primary desire is to use his integral hermeneutics specifically for understanding the Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue. In order to do this it would suit our purposes admirably if we were to concentrate on mainly the later levels of development i.e. 11, 12 and 13 (we will suggest possible further levels) of the Quadrants. But we shall also need to modify Wilber's diagram so that it captures that holon that interests us in particular, namely, that of Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue. I invite you, therefore, to peruse the diagram *Annexure 2* whilst you are reading through the following chapters. This diagram is intended as a visual aid to help grasp the developmental process as it proceeds holonically, or integrally (AQAL).

Several clarifications are still needed with regard to the interrelations between the Quadrants, how each Quadrant (or domain) finds its own validation of truth, and how reductionism occurs between the domains.

### 2.2.5 Quadrant interrelations

Wilber (1998:11f) uses an example of a single thought, that of going to the grocery store, to show the way in which these four domains interrelate. While having the thought, there are certain empirically measurable changes in the brain physiology and chemistry, increased dopamine, changed beta wave patterns and so on. That is the domain of UR. My interior apprehension of the thought is experienced in terms of images, symbols and meaning, or UL. However, because there are these measurable changes in the brain, it is not difficult to see how researchers might feel that they have covered all the bases when they reduce meaning into measurability, quality into quantity. The fact is that UL is not reducible to UR without remainder. The thought is experienced in a direct and interior way, not in terms of dopamine, for example. But the thought itself only makes sense in terms of the cultural background of the person in whom it occurs (LL). For a San bushman hunter, the need to find food would be expressed more appropriately in terms of tracking and hunting an antelope as opposed to finding an elusive parking spot outside the McDonald's. The vast networks and contexts of one's cultural community serves as the intrinsic background in which the thought arises, and shapes thought itself in the life and upbringing of the thinker.

However, culture itself has material components, just as thoughts have material components. For the original thought to be made possible, there has to be the

necessary technologies, horticultural, economic, transport, written codes and so on.

This is the "social action system", the "concrete material components" that are necessary for the actual worldview within which the thought arises to exist (LR).

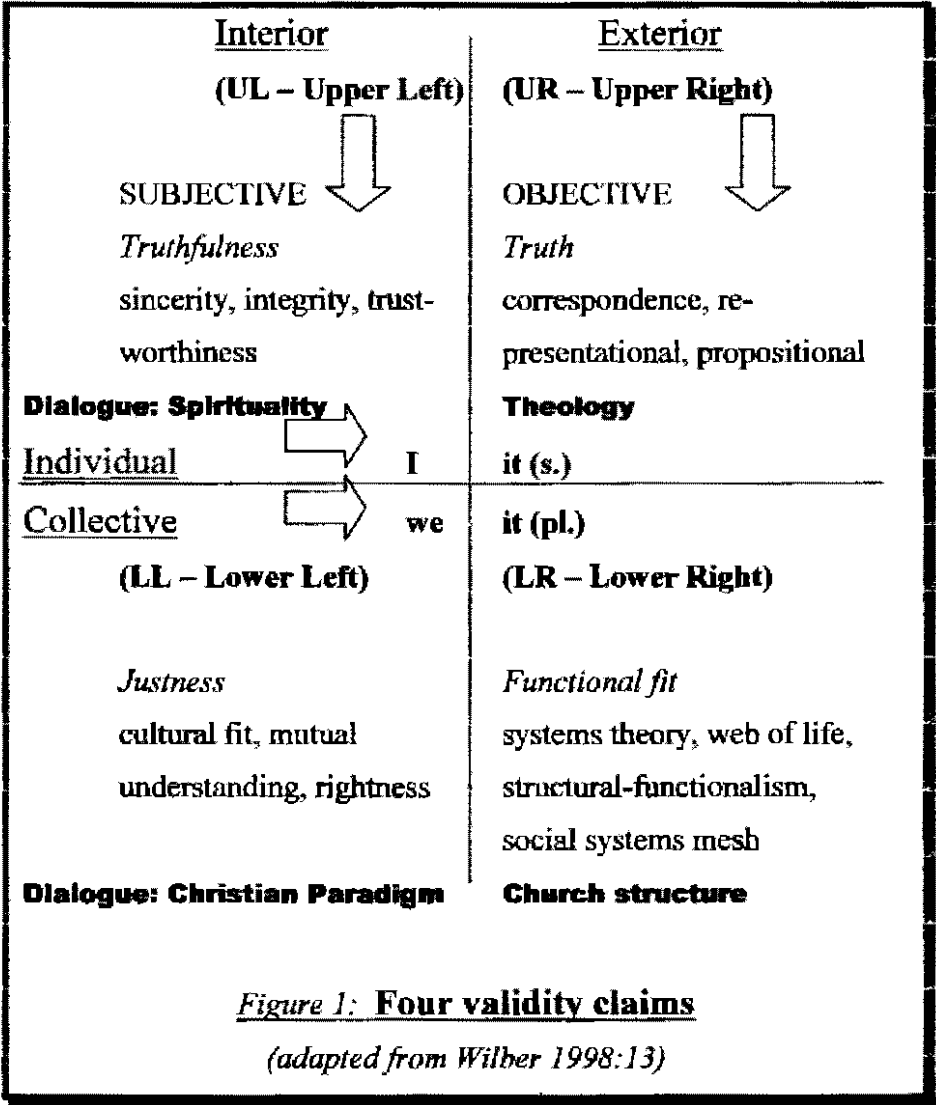
Thus, I might be among the Bushmen hunters, watching their interaction during the hunt. While I may well be physically in their society (LR), even listening to the language, unless I have learned the dialect I will not understand what is meant by the speech and symbols used, thus I am not within their culture (LL).

Thus, concludes Wilber (1998:12), "my supposedly 'individual thought' is actually a phenomenon that intrinsically has (at least) these four aspects to it - intentional, behavioural, cultural, and social... the social system will have a strong influence on the cultural worldview, which will set limits to the individual thoughts that I can have, which will register in the brain physiology... They are all mutually determining. They all cause, and are caused by, the others, in concentric spheres of contexts within contexts indefinitely."

## 2.2.6 Four Validity Claims

Linking into what was said earlier with regard to the two major streams in Western theology, philosophy and other disciplines, that is, objectivist and subjectivist, or exterior and interior approaches, it has become clear that there are not only two, but at least four broad areas of human learning. Each has its own ways of going about accumulating and validating data within its own domain. That is to say, each domain has its own, identifiable epistemologies, or ways of knowing, or kinds of truth. Wilber

(1998:13 ff.) makes the following distinctions between types of truth, or validity claims specific to each domain:



Beginning with the upper right Quadrant, Wilber (1998:12ff.) suggests that the type of truth found in this domain is variously known as “representational”, “propositional” or “correspondence”. These criteria are the guiding principles underlying the empirical sciences and much of our daily interaction. Something is said to be true if it matches the observable facts, it is a true representation or correspondence.

The Upper Left deals not so much with exterior observable facts as with the truthfulness of the one making the statement. The only way it is at all possible to understand the interior states of another is through dialogue and interpretation. One is interested not only in behaviour, but also in the other's feelings, state of mind, desires and fears. In the pursuit of this form of the truth of one's interior state, in other words, its phenomenology, the validity claim is dependent on trustworthiness and sincerity. Of course, there is always the possibility that the other may be lying to themselves, or otherwise misinterpreting their subjective condition. This brings one into the entire field of depth psychology. The therapist's aim is to allow the person to come to a more accurate interpretation of their dreams, repressions and distortions in order to see the true meaning of their baffling behaviour.

The Lower Right Quadrant approaches the communal from an objective position. As such, it attempts to situate each individual within a larger, intermeshing and total system. The objective behaviour of the system is its concern and the criterion by which truths in this domain are adjudicated.

The Lower Left tries to explain not how objects function together as an observably functional whole, but tries to understand how "subjects fit together in acts of mutual understanding" which creates the "intersubjective space (of) our commonly shared background contexts and worldviews" (Wilber 1998:16/17). Not only does a Christian share the same physical space as other Christians, but also the same intersubjective space of mutual recognition. Within that intersubjective space, ways have to be found to fit not only bodies, but minds together, recognizing and dealing creatively with the differences in culture, theology, ethics and morality. So much more so when inhabiting the same physical space with people with utterly different faiths. One is interested not only in Truth, not only in the person's spirituality (is she being

Truthful?), not only in the question of how people fit into an overall religious-sociological scheme, but also in what is just, what is good, what is fair. Understanding the Christian responsibility for interfaith dialogue as a holon means, then, that all four of these realms are taken into consideration, correlated with each other, and developmentally compared.

The important point is that each domain has its own type of evidence, its own data with which to decide what can be confirmed as true. Each has its own fallibilist criteria (Wilber 1998:18). In any act of confirming or rebutting a statement of knowledge, there are three factors involved, the instrumental injunction, intuitive apprehension and communal confirmation. Briefly, before anything is understood, there are certain things one has to do first. Before fully appreciating the Buddha's sayings, one has to learn to read and meditate upon the *Pali* text. Having fulfilled all the necessary injunctions, then the realization on the meaning of the poem dawns. However, one's interpretation needs to be confirmed or rejected by a community of the adequate in that field.

The empirical scientific method (found in our UR and LR) is generally taken as the model of genuine knowledge. The strength of the empirical approach is its insistence that knowledge be grounded in experiential evidence. This is highlighting the second factor of knowledge accumulation, that is, intuitive apprehension of data immediately available to the researcher. Thomas Kuhn (in Wilber 1998:86) suggested that science proceeds by means of paradigms, or exemplars. A paradigm is not merely a concept, as it is so often misunderstood. It is, in fact, an actual practice or series of practices that acts as a means of gaining new data. New injunctions generate new data.

Different injunctions will generate different data. The questions, quite simply, determine the very possibilities of the answers. Thus, Kuhn highlights the first factor,

namely, the injunction. Karl Popper (in Wilber 1998:87) emphasized the importance of falsifiability. Knowledge has to be open to the possibility of being confirmed or rejected in order to prevent its being dogma parading as truth. And this is, of course, our third factor.

## 2.2.7 Contemplative Knowing

Unfortunately, empiricism, Kuhn and Popper all insisted that these factors be limited only to the sensible realm. They gave little credence to the fact that in addition to sensory experience, there are also mental and particularly, spiritual experiences. In other words, the process of the injunction, illumination and confirmation/falsifiability applies not only to the sensible, empirical scientific realm, but also to *intelligibilia* and *transcendelia*<sup>41</sup>. It is specifically to this last realm that we now turn. “We cannot solve,” insists Wilber (1998:89)

the absolute/relative problem empirically, using the eye of flesh and its sensibilia; nor can we solve it rationally, using the eye of mind and its intelligibilia. The solution, rather, involves the direct apprehension of of transcendelia, which are disclosed only by the eye of contemplation and are most definitely verifiable or falsifiable in that domain, using what are in fact quite *public* procedures - public, that is, to all who have completed the injunction and disclosed the illumination.

Every question asked of the spiritual realm, when stated in intellectual terms, results in paradox and contradiction. It is only with higher states of consciousness development that the data are generated for the answers to spiritual questions. Thus, the Roshi will reject any intellectual reply to a Zen Koan out of hand no matter how profound. The correct answer, if one is to find one at all, is to take up the injunction (sitting meditation or *zazen*), wait for the illumination (*satori*) and have this confirmed



by the community of the adequate (those of similar spiritual capacity). To change the religious metaphor, it is not only in being hearers of the Word, but also doers of the Word, that we realize Christ's life in community here and now. In this way, we are holistic witnesses to the realization of the Kingdom of God in this life, in this moment.

### 2.2.8 Quadrant Reductionism

Wilber (1995:141,409 ff. &1998:20 ff.) emphasises two types of reductionism that theorists, quite often unwittingly, commit. Gross reductionism tries to explain the universe in terms of material atoms alone. Subtle reductionism is more widespread and damaging. This is the reduction of everything in both left hand Quadrants to their empirical correlates in the right hand Quadrants. Mind becomes brain; praxis becomes technology; quality foregone for quantity. It is precisely because all holons do have physical, measurable reality that subtle reductionism can be so convincing. There are myriad philosophies that claim to be fighting reductionism by pointing out the holistic nature of reality. Yet often they will still be describing the universe in "It" language. Very little discussion is dedicated to aesthetics, beauty, illumination, transpersonal intuition, justice and meditative phenomenology. One ends up, says Wilber (1998:22) with Whitehead's famous dictum on the modern scientific worldview as being a "dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly." Thus so many of the holistic and systems-oriented sciences are simply a subtle reductionism giving a "flatland web of interwoven its." However, the fact remains that "I" and "We" are inextricably bound up in the very nature of things.

If any one Quadrant is ignored in any system of thought (psychology, sociology, religion) then these truths will in fact reappear as contradictions in that system. Wilber (1998:24 ff.) gives names to the subtle reductionisms that plague theorists, working within their own fields, who elevate their preferred Quadrant thus denying themselves the opportunity of achieving a balance across all Quadrants. We take a brief look at the reductionism in each.

*Scientism* refuses to concede the independent (or rather interdependent) reality of both left hand Quadrants.<sup>42</sup> Everything that cannot be detected with the senses and their extensions are simply ignored. However, as Thomas Kuhn (1970) has so carefully pointed out, all scientific facts are embedded in cultural practices and paradigms. This means that the very assertion that all truth is strictly empirical is itself not empirical. Rather, it is an intersubjective assertion. Wilber points out that this intersubjective component of empirical knowledge is the basis of many critiques on scientism, including Piaget's cognitive-structural revolution, and Chomsky's<sup>43</sup> attack on Skinnerian behaviourism.

*Cultural constructivism* is that attempt to deny any form of objective truth at all. In other words, these theorists attempt to reduce all Quadrants to the Lower Left only by claiming that all truths are linguistically and culturally relative. Truth, they claim, is constructed according to a particular interest, be that sex, power, racism or ideological assumptions. Therefore, there can be no universal truths at all. This position is countered by its very own assertion, as we saw with Lindbeck. If there are no universal truths, how that statement itself be said to be true? This is a performative contradiction. "Aspects of knowledge are indeed intersubjectively constructed," concedes Wilber (1998:25), "but those constructions are set in networks of subjective, objective and interobjective realities that *constrain* the construction." An arbitrary

constructivism leads ultimately to mere silliness. The fact remains that culture is, at least in part, constructed on a pre-given sensory world that in some respects prevents arbitrary assertions, for example, that *saying* apples fall upwards means that this is fundamentally so.

*Aesthetic reductionism* theorizes that whatever the individual considers the most worthy, most beautiful or likable is the truth. In other words, one's subjective inclinations becomes the final arbiter of reality. This is a collapsing of all the Quadrants into the Upper Left only. Again, the solution to the distortion is to consider each Quadrant fairly and without con-fusion.

The great achievement of the Enlightenment was the differentiation of the three realms of I, We and It ("It" includes both Right Hand Quadrants). Wilber (1995:148) sees the great task of modernity and postmodernity as not merely replacing atomism with holism, but to integrate the "flatland of holism with the depth of I and the community of we" which is a very difficult task, but one "made all the more urgent by the fractured and dualistic worldviews of both atomism and holism." Wilber's integral vision attempts to include the truth that is found in every approach, whether it is empirical, constructivist, or aesthetic by situating them in a truly inclusive embrace.

We need to return now to Wilber's diagram as found in our Annexure 1. It is a particularly complex diagram, but useful for an overall view of Wilber's evolutionary synthesis. We will present a shortened explanation of both Left Hand Quadrants, then isolate those levels of development that relate particularly to our quest to provide an integral approach to the holon of Christian responsibility in interfaith dialogue.

Starting with the Upper Left, or individual development, and moving on the Lower Left (intersubjective) will provide us with sufficient data to proceed.

## 2.3 The Spectrum of Consciousness (UL)

Perhaps the very earliest academic task Wilber set out to achieve was to show as convincingly as he could that consciousness itself exists along a continuum that he calls the “spectrum of consciousness”. This same spectrum finds its place in the Upper Left Quadrant of his more mature thinking, fully expressed in *Sex, ecology and spirituality* (1995). In this work, he explains how consciousness, as a sense of selfhood, develops holonically through various stages, characterized by several critical fulcrums<sup>44</sup> or critical turning points in development.

### 2.3.1 The Early Fulcrums

The first fulcrum refers to the stage in which the self is largely physiocentric. The infant cannot distinguish between itself and maternal/material environment, and exists in a state of primary indissociation. This is the “oral phase” because the child has to come to terms with life in the physiosphere (nutrition, hydration).

At around the fifth to ninth month, the archaic indissociation gives way to the real birth of the separate self sense of the infant as it learns the difference between its physical self and the outside world. This is the second fulcrum. The self has disembedded from the material, but is still absorbed in emotional narcissism. The sensorimotor period (which covers numbers one through about five on the Quadrant diagram<sup>45</sup>), is primarily concerned with distinguishing the physical self from the physical environment. The defining characteristic of this period is *egocentrism*, according to Piaget (in Wilber 1995:212 f.). Egocentrism is the inability to understand

that its own perspective is not absolute. Development is thus a slow and often painful process, with much overlapping between stages, “from egocentrism to perspectivism, from realism to reciprocity and mutuality, from absolutism to relativity.”

At around eighteen months, assuming normal development, the child begins to transcend its emotional embeddedness (the third fulcrum) by learning to differentiate its own emotions from those around it. At this stage, a magical worldview dominates since for the child, the emerging images and symbols do not yet merely represent objects; they are thought to be concretely part of the things they represent. “Put simply,” says Wilber (1995:217)

such primary processes or magical cognition is not yet capable of grasping the notion of a holon. It does not set whole and part in a rich network of mutual relationships, but short-circuits the process by merely collapsing or confusing various wholes and parts - what Piaget calls syncretism and juxtaposition.... Magical cognition, then, is of fused and confused wholes and parts, and not mutually related wholes and parts. These “fused networks” of “syncretic wholes” appear very holistic (or “holographic”), but are actually not very coherent and do not match the already available sensorimotor evidence.

There is what might be termed a subjective “relation of participation” between objects and the self at this level. There are two aspects to this relation. First, the child's words, gestures are felt to be filled with the ability to change the outer world, or protect the child from danger. This is a relation of contiguity, metonym or Freud's *condensation* - in which different objects are related because they exist in the same space. The second aspect of this relation of participation is that the child thinks that things that have some sort of similarity can influence each other. The example Piaget (in Wilber 1995:217) uses; white pebbles make the water lilies (which are also white) grow. This is a relation of similarity, continuity, an example of Freud's *displacement* - a linking of objects since they share similar parts or predicates<sup>46</sup>.

As the child grows, its magical cognition soon recedes as it realizes that its special, personal links to objects do not quite work as first thought. Here is the beginning of the end of preoperational cognition, with the very early stages of concrete operational thought, the fourth fulcrum, becoming apparent. Because the magic is eventually shown to not work, the desire of the individual for omnipotence is transferred to other subjects, whether a person or deity. The resulting structure of cognition in the person is the *magic-mythic* level, which Piaget characterizes as “artificialist and “animistic”. It is out of this stage that many of the world's mythologies, that show such remarkable similarities across cultures, have arisen.

Wilber correlates these two levels i.e. magic and magic-mythic, with Piaget's preoperational thought, but with concrete operational beginning to break through. Thus far, we have very briefly covered numbers one through ten in Wilber's UL Quadrant diagram. We move on to level 11.

### 2.3.2 Concrete Operational Thought

As the mind begins to transcend its embeddedness within a principally biological orientation, it enters the world of other minds, called the *noosphere* by Teilhard<sup>47</sup>, Wilber's fourth fulcrum coming more fully into its own. During the early stages of the fourth fulcrum which Wilber terms the concrete operational (conop) level, there is still quite a large influence from the previous preoperational levels, making conop still rather egocentric and biocentric. If the sensorimotor level was exclusively focussed on the world as self, with the preoperational level focussed on the self as body, then the concrete operational level sees the self in terms of its role in society. The locus of the self is no longer egocentric, but sociocentric, or socially embedded, leading to the

mode identified by Kohlberg and Gilligan as the conventional stage of morality, Maslow as belongingness needs, and Loevinger as the conformist mode (Wilber 1995:225).

Further to taking on societal roles, the individual at this level is able for the first time to work with mental rules. Rules are operations upon classes of things, such as symbols or concepts. Thus, the individual begins to understand rules like multiplication, and hierarchization. The ability to grasp the relations between wholes and parts means that the individual is able to take the perspective of others. That is, not only realize that others have different perspectives, but also to actually reconstruct those perspectives mentally.

### 2.3.3 Formal Operational

If concrete operational thought used rules of thought to operate on the concrete world, the next level of awareness, Piaget's formal operational, represents a new and deeper interiority that operates on the rules themselves. *Reason* opens up a whole world of new possibilities that are not necessarily tied to the obvious, the phenomenal<sup>48</sup>.

A new identity is also achieved; that of a rational, thinking human being. Within formal operational thinking (formop), the rules of any society or religion can themselves be reflected on and be brought into question by more universal principles that apply not to just one culture, but cross-culturally and religiously. Concrete moral laws such as the Ten Commandments that might be interpreted as insisting on allegiance to a tribal god are integrated and transcended by less ethnocentric principles, those of compassion, mercy and justice based on a clearer understanding of

human rights (which Wilber tends to correlate with *agency*, or wholeness) and responsibilities (Wilber's *communion*, or being part of a larger whole).

Kohlberg, Gilligan, Habermas and Wilber call this development towards basing one's actions and decisions on rationality, and following the dictates of conscience as opposed to rules, *postconventional*. It follows from the earlier *preconventional* orientation of the egocentric, biocentric and narcissistic stages, through the *conventional*, or sociocentric stages, to a more pluralistic, worldcentric orientation. The self-identity at this level is no longer established within, through and by societal dictates and norms, but is dependent upon inner resources. For the first time, the question "Who am I?" becomes acute. Self-esteem needs of the rational, formal operational self emerge from the belongingness needs of the sociocentric, prerational self.

We can summarize the preceding stages of development as a process of ever-receding egocentrism, a moving away from self-centredness as one moves closer towards God. The maximum egocentrism occurs in the primary indissociation of the infant since the entire material world is absorbed into the sense of self. As the identity switches from physiocentric to biocentric, there is a stage of emotional egocentrism, our fulcrum 2. As the preoperational mind emerges, there is a lessening of emotional egocentrism, with a shift towards a magical egocentrism ("all things are made to serve me!" - fulcrum 3). With the next stage, conop, there is again a lessening of self-centredness towards ethnocentrism, with one's tribe or religion being supreme. This is a particularly noteworthy advance, since it provides the occasion for the individual at last to stand outside of her or his egocentrism to take on the role of the other. There is a further *decentering* (Piaget's term) on the formal operational level, where one can



take the perspective of not only others in one's group, but a worldcentric, pluralistic overview. Each stage transcends its predecessor. Each stage is, therefore, less egocentric and less caught in the narrower and shallower perspective. Where this finally leads to in the transpersonal domains is through the subtle, causal and nondual realms into One Taste. The self converges

on an intuition of the very Divine as one's very Self, common in and to all peoples (in fact, all sentient beings), a Self that is the great omega point of this entire series of decreasing egocentrism... The completely decentered self is the all-embracing Self (as Zen would say, the Self that is no-self) (Wilber 1995:231).

We will not deal with these realms in any detail, so let us return to the level that immediately follows the formal operational, rational level in the Upper Left Quadrant.

### 2.3.4 Vision-Logic/Centauroic

Wilber (1995:258 ff.) suggests that the capacity to go within and look at rationality is already a going beyond rationality, with the first step in that direction being *vision-logic*. If Piaget's formal operational stage is the problem solving stage, then beyond that lies a more creative and integrative stage of mature reason, or "network logic" or an "integral aperspectival" space that is no longer centred on family, tribe or country, but has a world orientation. Whereas formal operational rationality established the postconventional stages of civil liberties, or legal freedom for all, and later matures into demands for moral freedom for all humans as private persons<sup>49</sup>. The centauroic, vision logic stage (Habermas' communicative reason) goes even further by demanding legal, political and moral freedom for all human beings as members of a world

society. Since vision logic is able to differentiate from rationality, it is also able to integrate reason with all its junior holons. This is apparent today in the widespread concern for the ecological issues of species degradation, pollution and other issues that affect the entire planet. Thus, the centauric vision-logic can “integrate physiosphere, biosphere, and noosphere in its own compound individuality and this is... the next major stage of leading-edge global transformation, even though most of the ‘work yet to be done’ is still getting the globe up to decentred universal-rational pluralism in the first place” (Wilber 1995:260).

## 2.4 The Emergence of Meaning (LL)

Wilber (1995:151) is keen to show that many contemporary theoreticians accept (with many provisos) that parallels do indeed exist in ontogenetic and phylogenetic development. Erich Jantsch (1980), Karl Popper (1974), Erich Neumann (1954), Rupert Sheldrake (1989) and others show that development in the individual tends to recapitulate the “habits of nature” or the previously successful evolutionary trends<sup>50</sup>. It is to those habits or structural levels as they occur in human culture to which we now turn. Just as the individual develops from preconventional (magic) to conventional (mythic) to postconventional (rational) so the collective species has developed through the following:

### 2.4.1 Magical-Animistic

The long trek for humans out of roles exclusively dictated by biological givens (that is, male physical strength and mobility versus female birthing and nursing) required

an entirely new and novel structure of consciousness that only came about, according to Habermas (in Wilber 1995:155 ff.) once the male was assigned the role of father. Society defined itself along patriarchal lines for the first time, unlike horticultural societies<sup>51</sup>. With the noosphere having only just begun to emerge, though, it was still relatively undifferentiated from the biosphere. Mental images and symbols were often confused with the things and events they represent. It was thought that the mind could alter the physical world. This is still true of societies for example, who practice various forms of magic and voodoo. At the same time, certain items were thought to have special, subjective powers (animism). Individuals in these societies are at a pre-conventional moral stage, which means that they respond to rules and labels of good and bad interpreted “in terms of either physical or hedonistic consequences of action (punishment, reward, exchange of favour), or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels” (in Wilber 1995:165).

Yet, soon these societies, defined as they were by tribal kinship, began to come up against certain inherent limitations. Scarcity of land and increasing contact with other tribes with their own frameworks of social integration led to conflicts that could not be solved by tribalism alone. These difficulties were the catalyst for the emergence of a “political order that organized a society so that its members could belong to different lineages” which meant that a new, trans-tribal “collective identity was no longer represented in the figure of a common ancestor but in that of a common ruler... Legitimate power [and the administering of justice] was recognized in such a way that it possessed the characteristics of conventional morality [sanctified by tradition]... At the same time, mythological worldviews also took on - in addition to their explanatory function - justificatory functions....” (Habermas in Wilber 1995:169-70). The

transition into societies based on a common mythological organizational foundation was under way.

## 2.4.2 Mythological

The key to embracing different tribes into a wider communion, then, was now mythology and no longer magic. As we have seen, with the rise of the mythological structure, personal identity switched from being body based to being a role identity. Likewise, the communal identity switched from a blood-bound kinship (ancestral) orientation to a mythic membership under a ruler who was given authority because of what was believed to be a special relationship with the gods or goddesses.

In *Up from Eden* (1981) Wilber makes the point that these levels refer to the average mode of consciousness achieved within the culture, or the average mean found within a particular society. Some individuals will be below the norm, others above. Even in magical times, there would be individuals who were at the formal operational level, and some even at the psychic level. In mythological cultures, there were some individuals existing in lodges, *Sanghas* and monasteries, that is, micro-communities of the similarly depthed who had developed well into the transpersonal, mystical stages of awareness. However, religion among the general population would have remained well grounded in a “concrete-literal”<sup>52</sup> interpretation of their religious myths in a mythological culture. Anyone can choose to grow into the higher realms of spiritual, faith and dialogical depth, and to take up the necessary injunctions to achieve this: meditation, study, prayer, fasting, joining a community that strives for depth, and so on. Those who do not will generally remain within the confines of their restrictive mythological paradigms, and feel perfectly justified in criticising or

condemning, from within their worldview, the dialogical approaches of those who have progressed. We will look at an example of this in some detail in the next chapter.

### 2.4.3 Mythic Rational

Recall that formal operational thought, or rationality, was that capacity to reflect on one's own thoughts, actions and moral stance in a way that was not circumscribed by one's society or social roles (conformist mode). Rather, one could look for reasons for one's beliefs based not on tradition, authoritative scripture or dogmas, but on evidence. By reflecting on one's thinking, one is in some sense removed from their immediacy, which opens up new possibilities, new visions and other perspectives.

“Rationality is the great doorway to the invisible, through which, and the beyond which, lie so many secrets not given to the senses or to conventions (which is why all true mysticism is transrational and never antirational; ‘right thought’ always precedes ‘right meditation’)” (Wilber 1995:174). Of course, rationality has the characteristic of being highly integrative since its truth is open for all to observe. It is not bound to an ideology. Both a Buddhist and a Christian can agree to its findings without having to disagree because of religious or cultural differences. Reason allows the beginning of a truly global integration that allows each society its own unique and irreplaceable existence and input.

What happens when a largely mythological group encounters this emerging rationality? There is generally one of three responses; to ignore it,<sup>53</sup> to accept reason's evidence and transform, or to simply prop up the myths using formal operational thinking thus creating a mythic rational culture somewhere between the mythological and the rational. More specifically, what these new empires and civilizations had to

deal with was the universalising tendency of reason, and this first expresses itself in an attempt to conquer the world militarily under the banner of the myth; the Roman eagle, a cross, a crescent moon or hammer and sickle. Thus, one could indeed have equal access to citizenship, or be a world citizen provided one embrace, for example, Caesar as king. The old mythological structures also had implicit in them the beginning of another aspect of global citizenship, namely, equality before God. Again, the inherent limitation was that one had to accept that mythology in order to qualify for this equality. Thus, baptized Christians were all equal, but all Buddhists would go to Hell. The limits to the integrating ability of the mythic rational structures of the empires was clearly shown when they came up against other empires.

The reality of other empires was incompatible with this definition of the boundaries and social environment of an empire. Despite the existence of trade relations, and despite the diffusion of innovations, the empires shielded themselves from this danger; between themselves they maintained no diplomatic relations in the sense of an institutionalized foreign policy. Their political existence was not dependent on a system of reciprocal recognition [they were not truly rational-planetary] (Habermas in Wilber 1995:177).

Whilst the mythic rational structures rely on formal operational thinking to bolster their faith, the way forward was to allow the full transformation out of myth into mind, something that Wilber (1995:178) rates as one of the most difficult of all historical transformations. That is, the process of replacing local and divisive mythologies that can only be supported imperialistically with a universal reasonableness that is supported by shared evidence. That transformation led to what a new stage of integration that we shall simply call “rational”.

#### 2.4.4 Rational

Along with Habermas and Gebser, Wilber (1995:179) puts the emergence of the egoic rational at roughly the middle of the first millennium BCE but reaching its full expression with the creation of the nation-state in sixteenth century Europe. These states formally recognized and made room for each other by separating itself from its embeddedness in its own mythology sufficiently to recognize that other states had a right to exist as well. This mutuality was made possible in many instances only by the very desirable, from a religious perspective, separation of the church from the state. Religion would no longer allow itself to be used to legitimise purely power-political pursuits.

In philosophy, the questions had moved on from asking questions about reality out there, to questions on the structures within the person who wanted to know. This move to interiority could be seen in the rise of “rational religions” that took their stand not on a traditional God that had to be appeased ritually, but on the seeker him or herself. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you”, along with “The Kingdom of God is within” being paradigmatic. Or, as Wilber (1995:179) summarizes Gautama's teaching; “Don't worry about gods, goddesses, spirits, the afterlife, any of that - rather, look very carefully at the nature of your own subject, your own self, and try to penetrate to the bottom of that, for if enlightenment exists, it lies through an understanding of (and going beyond) the subject self.”

In a postconventional society, individuals are no longer identified by their roles, but by the fact that they are free and equal subjects of civil law, free to choose and pursue their own political agenda, and are also morally free agents. Of course, since the rational society is newly emergent, pathologies are always possible, where instead of rationality integrating its junior holons, it either represses them, or integration goes

too far into dissociation. These pathologies are to be seen in contemporary western societies. Little comment is required on the devastating effects of repressing the feminine, repressing feelings, repressing the earth. Dissociative tendencies can be seen in the New Age movement, in which critical judgement is suspended, and regressive spiritual practices are not distinguished from progressive ones.

Assuming, however, that all proceeds smoothly, one can expect the society to progress to the next stage.

#### 2.4.5 Vision-Logic/Planetary

This is, for Ken Wilber, precisely the integrative stage that is attempting to make its presence felt right now in the world. If rationality offered different possibilities and perspectives, vision-logic binds them into a network that holds all ideas in relation. It holds in mind contradictions and opposites in a dialectic and nonlinear way that negates the partialities of those ideas but preserves their unique and positive contributions. In terms of culture, this means that people who are free subjects under civil law, morally free agents and politically free would not long be confined to those states, having realized that there is no need to defend these rights against citizens of other states. They share these things in common as world citizens. Quoting Habermas (in Wilber 1995:186): "The need for coordination at a supra-national level cannot easily be satisfied as long as governments have to legitimate themselves exclusively in terms of national decisions," which simply means that the internal limitations of the rationally founded nation-state desperately needed to be released by a vision-logic/planetary transformation.



The classic Enlightenment paradigm, as we have seen, split the atomistic self off from the holistic world. This thwarted attempt at the differentiation of mind and body has created a dissociation that shows itself all too familiarly in the biosphere (ecological devastation) and the noosphere (psychological dysfunctionality). Tribal magic, mythical imperialism, and objective rationalism have all in turn showed themselves incapable of providing the necessary impetus for an integration that would bring healing to all. It is only a planetary worldview, or a “supranational organization of planetary consciousness” that will allow for the “genuine recognition of ecological balance” and the “unrestrained flow of worldwide communicative exchange” along with “the production of genuine world citizens” (1995:187).

Because vision-logic transcends but includes formal operational, it completes and brings to fruition many of the trends begun with universal rationality itself, which is why many writers refer to vision-logic as ‘mature reason’ or ‘dialectical reason’ or ‘synthetic reason’ and so on (Wilber 1995:259).

Whilst formal operational rationality established the postconventional stages of civil, legal and moral freedoms for individuals, vision-logic as mature, communicative reason offers a “worldcentric orientation of universal pluralism” which results in a world society of ever more morally, politically and religiously free human beings. The resultant worldview Wilber generally calls “centauric.” Since vision-logic is differentiated from rationality, it can operate upon it, and integrate reason with all its predecessors. Thus, the holon of Christian interfaith dialogue can look back upon the various stages through which it grew, and instead of rejecting the earlier stages as wrong, can integrate them into a higher synthesis, precisely the task of this thesis. As we shall see, it is towards a vision-logic/planetary level of Christianity that remains the goal for large parts of the religion today. The freedom of communicative

exchange between religions is a goal that cannot be realized by the preceding religious stage. That, however, is somewhat ahead of the story, suffice it to say that as important as this level is, it is not final, but acts as the doorway to much higher, and more interesting, transpersonal states of consciousness and worldviews that lie in our collective future. Before turning our attention to those transpersonal realms within the spectrum of consciousness (UL) and within cultural worldviews (LL), let us summarize what has been said in this section on the emergence of human culture:

Evolution can and usually is characterized by the arising of emergent possibilities. However, this process is always accompanied by potential pathologies. The problems and the needs at one level are to some extent solved on the next, which in turn not only generates new resources, but leads to new problems, new needs. One way of placing the process of evolution in human cultural development into perspective is to trace its needs and pathologies. Wilber (1995:198-199) agrees with the broad structure of Habermas' "phylogenetic needs hierarchy" which we can quickly summarize. For the *magic/animistic* society struggling with a differentiation from nature, power over nature is considered a scarce resource. This perceived powerlessness, in the face of a seemingly dangerous and overwhelming natural world is dealt with via magic and early mythological motifs.

In *mythic and mythic-rational* societies, the major problem that arises is the need to regulate the social system, ways of ordering the state. These systems thus legitimise social domination as a means of social regulation, which then, simultaneously, defuses the powerlessness of the previous magic-animistic stage.

In *egoic-rational* societies, the primary problem subsists in finding self-regulating exchange with external nature. This means that material value comes into

consciousness as a scarce resource. On this level, it is felt that the most important issue is biomaterial or economic exchange, so the path of material and economic enrichment is avidly pursued. In these societies, social injustices and inequalities are the pathologies that arise. Thus, various (very often invariably democratically inspired) social upliftment strategies are developed to counter these, whilst defusing the central problem of the last stage - legal, moral and civil domination. The level of awareness at this level, we have seen, is formal operations or rationality. An individual need not learn calculus or propositional logic in order to have accessed the level of formal rationality. "Every time you imagine different outcomes, every time you see a possible future different from today's, every time you dream the dream of what might be, you are using formal operational awareness" Wilber 1995:259). From this platform then, it is possible to grow into *vision-logic*, the capacity to look at rationality itself, thus result in being released from its hold on one, which invites one to move beyond into the beginnings of the transpersonal domains. In postmodern or planetary/vision-logic societies, the primary problem is the self-regulating exchange of society with *internal* nature. Thus, self-esteem and self-actualisation needs arise to counter one of the most glaring pathologies of this level, namely anomie, or existential meaninglessness. What is considered a scarce resource in a postmodern society, then, is the supply of motivation, meaning and inner certainty.

With that, we move on to look at the further reaches of human development.

#### 2.4.6 The Transpersonal Domains

It is necessary to trace the development beyond vision-logic since interfaith dialogue not only finds a voice on the pre-egoic and egoic levels, but also in the transegoic levels. Nevertheless, since the source of much of the present level of Christian dialogue generally finds itself struggling to rise up through mythic rationality and rationality and transform into the vision-logic/ planetary level, we need only briefly touch on Wilber's four stages beyond vision-logic<sup>54</sup>.

This sets the stage for the development of the human person into the transpersonal domains. What exactly does Wilber mean by the "transpersonal" levels or stages?

#### 2.4.6.1 Psychic Level

Wilber generally uses the term "mysticism" to mean any form of awareness beyond that which is centred on or in the individual ego. The psychic level is the first of these mystical stages. Just as the centaur was able to integrate those experiences that were somatically orientated, or had their referent in gross reality, so the psychic level has the capacity to integrate the centauric level. Included in this first of the transpersonal realms are many varied experiences that differ enormously in their surface structures, that is, in their actual manifestation, cultural expressions, and interpretations.

*Kundalini*, paranormal cognitions, astral travel, speaking in tongues, being "slain in the Spirit", reliving the birth experience, nature mysticism and cosmic consciousness are the different expressions, or surface structures, of this level. The differences in expression are obviously dependent on the religious, cultural and linguistic milieux in which they arise. Yet, all share in common the fact that the experiences go beyond the

individual ego into a spiritual domain, but nevertheless remain reasonably closely orientated to the body.

Wilber (1995:285) points to Waldo Emerson's notion of the "Over-Soul" as a useful example of this level of development. The internal witness, or that part of the self that observes the self-concept, had already become quite apparent in the rational, reflective stage. This same witness, says Emerson, now transcends the isolated person within onto a vast expanse of awareness no longer obsessed with the individual bodymind.

We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole of which these are the shining parts, is the [Over-Soul]. And this deep power in which we exist and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one.... In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, - no disgrace, no calamity, which nature cannot repair. Standing on bare ground, - my head bathed by the blithe air, and lifted into infinite space, - all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God (in Wilber 1995:285-6).

If the worldcentric centaur is a person who integrates the physiosphere, biosphere and noosphere, this new and wider embrace is a conscious unity with those realms, or a "Kosmic consciousness". The psychic level, in which many mystical experiences might be encountered, is also sometimes referred to as "nature-mysticism" because of its appreciation of the unity between self and the universe. Wilber though is most insistent that Emerson is not simply equating the Spirit of God with nature. Nature is thoroughly immersed and bathed in Spirit, but Spirit also transcends nature.

The psychic domain is easily confused with the indissociation of the magical realm we have investigated previously. This is when spirit is simply fused or con-fused with nature, which often leads to a narcissistic worship of nature<sup>55</sup>. It is also beyond the dissociation of the mythic level, where nature and spirit are ontologically separated.

This is common in mythic and mythic rational societies. Instead, this is a “psychic mysticism,” in which nature becomes a wonderful expression of God who fully embraces nature but also transcends it; the immanent and transcendent aspects kept in perfect balance.

The morality at this level is also a culmination of the evolution of the moral sense through the past cultural levels. The universalising and worldcentric moral tendencies in the rational and vision-logic/planetary (postconventional) were then experienced in only a conceptual way. Now they are experienced directly as part of one's self. This is because all sentient beings are experienced as being part of one's self, thus all beings begin to be treated as one's very self. This realization is the source of true compassion that does not need to be enforced or even thought about; it arises completely naturally. It is a compassion that does not put self first egocentrically, nor one's society first sociocentrically, nor human beings first anthropocentrically, nor even the world first worldcentrically. Rather, it is grounded in the clear understanding that the distinctions between self and other are at their root illusory. Wilber (1995:292) quotes

Schopenhauer:

For if plurality and distinction [‘separate selves’] belong only to this world of *appearances*, and if one and the same Being is what is beheld in all these living things, well then, the experience that dissolves the distinction between I and the Not-I cannot be false. On the contrary: its opposites must be false. The former experience underlies the mystery of compassion, and stands, in fact... [as] the metaphysical ground of ethics and consists simply in this: that *one* individual should recognize in *another*, himself in his own true being.

This experience of unity as a common universal self in all things, then, comes in any of its myriad forms. But this is the undeniable unfolding of a deeper interiorisation that embraces ever more truth, truthfulness and rightness within one's own compound individuality that is, of course, not yet complete.

#### 2.4.6.2 Subtle Level

Subtle level mysticism reveals itself *inter alia* through interior illuminations, archetypal forms and interior consolations that have in common referents, which do not appear in the gross realm of the body and senses. Thus, Wilber refers to it also as *deity mysticism* because the experiences at this level are so often associated with the awesomeness and the immense power and grandeur of the Divine. This is a step up from nature mysticism, which was the experience of unity with the world.

Paradigmatic for this level is Teresa of Avila's (in Peers 1989) very precise description of the "seven mansions" or stages of her mystical experiences. For Wilber (see 1995:294) Teresa's fifth mansion parallels his psychic level. The calming and slowing of the gross orientated faculties such as memories, thoughts and senses, that took place in the fourth mansion via the Prayer of Recollection and Prayer of Quiet now leads, through the Prayer of Union, to the soul first directly realizes its deep abiding in God found within the heart. Here, the soul experiences for the first time a cessation of all faculties. This transformative absorption, no matter how brief, causes the self to be changed forever. In the sixth mansion, the absorption lasts much longer where the soul is "so completely absorbed and the understanding so completely transported - for as long as a day, or even several days - That the soul seems incapable of grasping anything that does not awaken it to love."

The sixth mansion, or subtle stage, introduces as we have come to expect its own pathology. The difficulty is, as always, a problem of differentiation and integration. Either the self is over-inflated at that level and so cannot properly integrate, or too much identified with the level, thus losing self among others at that same level. This

time, the agony is precisely in the subtlety of the experience of the loss of God, or whatever other archetype of self has been useful until this point. Teresa's contemporary, John of the Cross (see Thompson 1983:232) refers it to the "dark night of the soul". This is the agony that comes from having tasted God only to have that taste fade, the level not yet having been established as a permanent structure in the person. "The little butterfly [soul] suffers much, much more torture than anything the ego suffers or even could suffer," a trial that Wilber (1995:618) compares with the Buddhist pseudo-*Dukkha*.

A most interesting parallel exists between Teresa's understanding of cessation and the Hinduism's formless absorption - *nirvikalpa samadhi*. The cessation is hinted at in the fourth mansion with the Prayer of Quiet, but becomes ever more refined and better established through later mansions triggering in those the various visions and illuminations (*sovikalpa samadhi*). For Teresa, this cessation is a pure union with God, but remains conditional until all traces of dualism in perception and perceiver are overcome and the soul transcends to the seventh mansion (Wilber's causal realm, Hinduism's *jnana samadhi*).

### 2.4.6.3 Causal Level

Meister Eckhart and Ramana Maharshi are for Wilber paradigmatic for the causal realm. Here, the soul and God are transcended in a prior identity, which Eckhart calls the "Godhead". This is a pure, formless awareness, or pure consciousness in Spirit, which is completely formless and boundless. The causal is in some sense not simply a further stage, but the ground or Suchness of all the stages, all manifestation, whether



trapped or transcendent, gross or grounded, sacred or profane. Eckhart (in Wilber 1995:302) describes this stage masterfully:

In the breakthrough, where I stand free of my own will and of the will of God and of all his works and of God himself, there I am above all creatures and am neither God nor creature. Rather, I am what I was and what I shall remain now and forever. Then I receive an impulse [awareness] which shall bring me above all the angels. In this impulse I receive wealth so vast that God cannot be enough for me in all that makes him God, and with all his divine works. For in this breakthrough I discover that I and God are one. There I am what I was, and I grow neither smaller nor bigger, for I am an immovable cause that moves all things... There I willed nothing, I desired nothing, for I was a pure Being in delight of the truth. There I stood, free of God and of all things. But when I took leave from this state and received my created being, then I had a God.

This going within and beyond leads to a formless and silent awareness in which one does not *see* God, for one is the very Godhead as pure witness, that pure opening in which all experiences and objects arise. Ramana (in Wilber 1995:305-306) finds the biblical definition of God, “I Am that I Am” a perfect description of Absolute Being, for in knowing the Self, God is known. “In that state there is Being alone. There is no you, nor I, nor he; no present, nor past, nor future. It is beyond time and space, beyond expression. It is ever there.” This state, Ramana refers to as the “I-I”, in which Mind has vanished, so reminiscent of Eckhart’s “mindless awareness” and Zen’s “no-mind”. This causal awareness is not the end of the story, however. Once one has broken through to this cessation, all manifest worlds arise once again, but this time not seen as apart from the Godhead, but as a perfect expression of Spirit. The entire Kosmos and God are seen to be nondual. This is the final movement from causal unmanifest to nondual embrace (*sahaj samadhi*). We let Wilber (1995:309-310) describe it for us:

No objects, no subjects, only this. No entering this state, no leaving it; it is absolutely and eternally and always already the case... prior to the four

Quadrants, prior to the split between inside and outside, prior to seer and seen, prior to the rise of worlds, ever-present as Pure Presence.... This All is I-I. I-I is emptiness. Emptiness is freely manifesting. Freely manifesting is self-liberating. Zen, of course, would put it all much more simply, and point directly to just this.

Still pond.  
A frog jumps.  
Plop!

## 2.4.7 Basic structures, transition structures, the self-system, lines of development and pathologies

We have a brief description before us of the various levels of development through the Quadrants. What remains for us to establish something of the process whereby holons find their way through the stages of development.

In order to show how the self negotiates its way through the various levels of the Quadrants, Wilber distinguishes between “basic structures”, “transition structures” and “the self-system”. These distinctions are important, because development as transcendence may be defined very simply as “negate and preserve.” But what exactly is negated and what is preserved? Buddhas who have dropped or negated all sense of a separate self, must still eat food in order to survive. What does the holon keep during transcendence, and what does it let go?

First, the *basic structures* of Wilber’s model are simply the levels in the Great Chain of Being that emerge through growth and remain permanently part of the self. These are essentially the levels of development that we have investigated already so far – prerational, rational and transrational, or matter, body, mind, soul and spirit. Basic

structures are those enduring structures that, having emerged in the process of development, remain, or are preserved.

Second, *transition structures* come into existence at each level of development, are appropriate at that level, but are replaced when the self moves to the next level of development. Some examples of a transition structure are worldviews, self-needs, and moral stages. In other words, the self takes these structures on at each level, but these are replaced or negated at the next level.

Third, mediating between these basic and transition structures is the *self-system*.

Wilber (1998:142, 242) suggests that the self-system is the location of several crucial capacities, such as that of self-identity, organizational ability, defence mechanisms, and choice. When the self comes upon the next level of unfolding development (basic structure) the self identifies with the transitional structures at that stage. When a higher basic structure emerges, that identification is dropped and the new level's transition structures are utilised for self-identification. For example, the mythic rational level, the self will be identified with the dominant worldview of the group, tribe or religious community. Once the rational stage emerges, the self drops its self-identification with the wisdom of the collective in order to find its own self-identity based on its own experience and insights. At the same time, a new moral stance is generated, a new sense of safety needs and so on. As the self-system negotiates each basic structure, its conscious identity expands, leaving behind its narrower self-definition, letting go its exclusive identity with the previous, less embracing level. It can now operate upon that previous level. It is no longer held captive by that level. These simple distinctions becomes crucial when trying to decipher why dialogians at the mythic-rational level are often so vitriolically opposed to those who have progressed into the deeper levels of dialogue. They are, when located at a particular

basic structure, bound to the transitional structures at that level, such as their understanding or interpretation (worldview) of interfaith issues. Until they have made the requisite journey into deeper self-awareness, that is, the next basic structure, will be unable to “get” the new transitional structure’s wider worldview which would assist them in adopting that new level’s keener ability to make critical distinctions, that are not “stuck” embedded in their own traditions, in their approach to dialogue. We need to make explicit what Wilber means by “lines of development.” The seventeen or so levels or stages of development exist as the basic, deep structures. This remains in place as a template through which development occurs. The sequence of those stages is invariant, even if some are negotiated quicker than others are. However, these stages do not account for what exactly it was that passes through these stages. In his earlier works, Wilber concentrated almost exclusively on the growth of *consciousness* through the levels. Wilber saw the need to distinguish between the various aspects of self that are in the process of development, which comprises far more than merely consciousness. Wilber, thus, has come to speak of different developmental lines that unfold through the seventeen stages, each of which develops in a “quasi-independent” way<sup>56</sup>. Some of these lines include affective ability, morality, interpersonal, object-relations, cognition, self-identity, psychosexual, creativity, and various talents, musical, sports and artistic. This advantage of this model is that it can account for the fact that a person can, in one particular situation, be at a very high cognitive level, but simultaneously at a low moral stage, or perhaps with an unconscious fixation affecting fulcrum one, or self-dissociation<sup>57</sup>.

An understanding of this model of self-development becomes crucial for our thesis of the development of a Christian responsibility for interfaith dialogue. A person who

cognitively recognises the need for a more inclusive approach to dialogue, for example, but may have arrested development in her or his death-seizure line, or self-identity, may find the transcendence towards a more inclusive dialogical approach nearly impossible to achieve until those underlying issues have been uncovered and released. Thus, a person's growth towards greater integration of one's responsibility for dialogue is dependent on much more than merely getting to grips with the relevant theological (cognitive) material. It is equally dependent on all the other lines of development too. I have yet to find a model of Christian interfaith development, including that of Race, Knitter, Küng, or Cobb that is able to take into account these many lines of development.

At each level of development then, there is a differentiation, or a dis-identification with the shallower perspective of selfhood, into a more integrated and fuller self-identity (which, for our purposes now can be thought of as including all these lines of development.). We saw that at conop (that is, fulcrum four), the child speaks no longer of being a body, but rather as being a person, in the sense of having a social role or persona. Early formop sees the adolescent disidentifying from what is seen as a false outer appearance as reflexive self-awareness becomes available to the person, and enables her or him to transcend mythic membership social roles. It is at this stage that the new sense of self is able, sketchily at first, to remain as a witness to the stream of mental events, without necessarily being caught up in every thought or stream of consciousness.

Wilber (1995:261) points out that development does not always proceed smoothly through the stages. There is a preponderance of clinical evidence to show that if any of the developmental fulcrums are disturbed, a specific pathology at that level can be generated – psychotic, borderline, neurotic, script, identity, existential, psychic, subtle

and causal, a veritable “spectrum of pathologies” (see Wilber 1984, 1995, 1996b, Wilber et al. 1986).

Let us briefly look at some of the pathologies that occur through a few of the stages.

At the rational, there may arise a radical emphasis on a purely *relativistic* point of view; that there is no place for the subject within the objective network of relationships. This is, of course, the pathological form of the fundamental Enlightenment paradigm, one that splits an atomistic self off from an objectively holistic world. The dissatisfaction with this state of affairs acts as a spur to further development, and can only be rectified or defused through transcendence towards vision-logic. Only when the mind and body are both experienced as an integrated self, that is, the self is not exclusively identified with either the body, or persona, or mind, but has integrated them all in a higher unity, then the self experiences vision-logic, or a “centauric identity”.

At this stage, though, a new, characteristic pathology may occur. An *existential dread*, that seizes the totality of one's being in the world, is experienced in response to the question posed by the spectre of death. Wilber (1995:263) says that Tolstoy's question, “Is there any meaning in my life which will not be destroyed by the inevitable death awaiting me?” is one that haunts this level, and is kept out of consciousness through inauthenticity, or an avoidance of the need to grow. The question would never arise within the magical structures, since here meaning is assured by the self's cosmocentricity — the world centres on *me*. The question does not arise for a mythic believer whose soul is assured of salvation through the wholehearted commitment to a confession of undying belief in God. A crisis of faith at this level only occurs when the person no longer trusts in the mythical god, but this is easily avoided of the remnant of the saved — the Bible was written for *us*. The

question does not occur to the rationalist, who relegates such questions to the realm of the unthinkable or ridiculous. It is only to the one who no longer finds consolations in comforting myth or in certainty of mind that such existential dread comes, promising nothing but darkness and the Void. Again, this dilemma finds its release only in a higher transcendence that leads into the transpersonal domains.

Having looked at the development of the self as it juggles the lines through the various stages, we need to endeavour to understand the levels that exist within religions in general, and Christianity in particular, that pertain to our subject i.e. the growth of Christian responsibility for interfaith dialogue. Before that, however, we will want to address any objections that may be raised towards using Wilber's model as our hermeneutical basis.

## 2.5 Assessment

Using Wilber's integral philosophy as a foundation for understanding the growth of Christian dialogue faces many objections and challenges, and those that bear directly on our subject matter need to be addressed before actually dealing with that subject (viz. viewing the growth of Christian dialogue from this integral perspective). There are three challenges that are relevant in this context are; a hermeneutical hassle, a philosophical worry and a theological challenge. We'll take each in turn.

### 2.5.1 Minding Mystical Mediation

Arguably, the most intense indictment of Wilber's hermeneutics comes from Steven Katz (1978, 1992) and like-minded collaborators. Katz's question concerns itself fundamentally with the location of the *referent* of mystical experiences. Since Wilber's entire hermeneutics, we have argued, is dependent upon One Taste, Katz needs to be heard and responded to if Wilber's system is to be at all useful.

Katz (1978:22 ff.) begins by trying to clear up two issues before getting down to his major epistemological concerns, which, if he made himself at all clear, is to show as convincingly as he can that there are *no pure, or unmediated, experiences*. He feels, firstly, that it is utterly impossible to provide any sort of convincing verification for any mystical event. There can be no independent basis for the event itself to be publicly demonstrated, thus rendering mysticism as such incapable of being used to establish the truth or falsity of religions or religious claims. Secondly, it is just as impossible to separate the mystical experience from the interpretation of that experience. In other words, a mystical experience is not only interpreted after the fact through the lens of religious, cultural and other factors of the mystic, but that these factors predetermine in a real way what can be experienced as mystical at all that same mystic. Katz (1978:27 ff.) then provides several pages of evidence to show that "this process [of differentiating] mystical experience into the patterns and symbols of established religious communities is experiential and does not only take place in the post-experiential process of reporting and interpreting the experience itself: it is at work before, during, and after the experience."

Let us be clear about what Katz is arguing for here: he wants to show that a Christian mystic, for example, does not have an experience of some unknown reality which he then conveniently labels "Jesus" or "The Trinity". The actual forms of consciousness that the mystic brings actually sets the parameters of what can be experienced at all.



These structures of consciousness (i.e. which are informed by their specific linguistic, social, historical and other contexts) are themselves part of the experience itself. Thus, he concludes, there can only be a Christian mystical experience, or a Hindu mystical experience, not a generic experience that is later interpreted in different ways<sup>58</sup>.

We begin by addressing Katz' assertion that mystical experiences cannot be publicly verified. If we look at any nonempirical endeavour (by "empirical" we mean the thing can be seen with the senses or the extensions thereof, like a microscope) such as literature, it becomes quickly obvious that one cannot physically see the meaning of Hamlet. The realization that Hamlet is about a King's inherent character fault causing a major social upheaval, and not about purchasing real estate in a small suburban town. The meaning is interiorly and intersubjectively apprehended. It cannot be empirically seen, but can only be intersubjectively explained. The meaning is interiorly apprehended (UL), and is intersubjectively verified by a community of the adequate (LL) i.e. those who have developed the necessary cognitive and literary skills and to whom the light of understanding clicks on while reading the book. Of course, this meaning has empirical correlates, such as the words printed in a book, the thoughts registering on an EEG (Right Hand Quadrants). Direct mystical experiences, as we have seen, are the higher reaches of the Upper Left Quadrant, and those experiences as a real as those that have gone before, and are as verifiable by a community provided they are adequate to the task.

Thus, for Katz to assert the non-verifiability of mystical experiences, means that he has made one of two errors: first, he has confused epistemological realms by wanting to verify UL and LL using empirical (Right Hand realms) methods only (the standard positivist mistake). Second, he has reduced mystical experiences, which are at the psychic, subtle or causal levels, to the rational (the standard Freudian reductionist

mistake, or pre-fallacy). Mystical experiences may be rationally reconstructed, in other words, explained in a rational way, but they can never be rationally experienced. It cannot be caught in the framework of language, concepts, thinking and imagining without remainder. Unless the person has gone through the necessary developmental stages of the unfolding of those higher transpersonal levels, those stages remain invisible to that person<sup>59</sup>. Put another way, Katz says that the mystic's referent is unverifiable since it does not exist within a rational worldspace. Katz is correct in intuiting that the referent does indeed exist outside of rationality, and therefore cannot be verified rationally. He is *incorrect* in assuming that it cannot be verified at all, for there are other mystics who have developed the requisite interior structures and thus are able to "see" that which is signified by the mystic, and understand clearly the referent which exists not in a rational worldspace, but in a transrational (psychic, subtle, causal) worldspace. The words "Buddha nature" are perfectly understandable to the person and her similarly depthed community who have developed the requisite subtle/causal level of awareness, and often so even though their mythological and rational roots may be Christian or Hindu. You do not have to be Buddhist to have experienced the deep structural levels of Buddha nature.

Next, we examine Katz's claim that cross-cultural commonalities in mystical experiences are not possible since these differences are part of those experiences themselves. The structures of consciousness and mystical experiences are inseparable. But the fact that every experience is already situated within a context, which in turn is also located in a context is not in dispute. Every holon is always a context within a context, thus situated, thus mediated. The point is that at some point, the point of apprehension, there is a direct touching of the immediacy of the event itself. This immediacy means that at that moment, mediation ceases in the openness of pure

Presence. When seeing a beautiful Van Gogh painting, at that moment, I experience that beauty in an immediate and utterly simple way as it enters my consciousness. If this were always and only mediate, there could be no immediacy and therefore no experience at all. Nothing would stop the spinning of contexts long enough for it to enter consciousness. Whilst the experiencer and experienced are contextually situated forever, at the moment they meet, there is a immediate experience in a mediated world. Some scholars put it more forcefully: "We seem to move" says Keenan (1989:193) "in a world of immediacy, which only gradually, over the course of one's life, and only in part is ever mediated. If no pure experiences are present without interpretation, then how would a newborn child experience anything?"

Wilber (1995:601) makes the point that even as Katz ponders the mediated nature of all experience, at some point the data itself enters his consciousness directly. He directly touches that notion. In other words, to say that all experiences are mediated is to stand in a space that itself is not mediated, otherwise he would not or could not ever know it at all. Thus makes Katz claim is in fact utterly self-defeating. By claiming that all experience wherever found is mediated, he makes a truth claim that itself cuts across cultures, that is true transculturally. Unfortunately, his thesis denies this same right to mystics who claim that their experiences are transcultural.

Notice that this prehension, or direct experience, can occur in the same way across any domain, whether sensory, mental or spiritual. Katz has made a validity claim that deals with the mystical realm only, but is content to use Stace's (see Katz 1978:27 f.) example of an American visitor to Madame Toussaud's in London to deal with the issue of experience and interpretation, which is, of course, the mental realm. While Katz is making a statement about the validity of mystical validity claims, the question is this; does the mediated aspect of all experience - not just mystical experience -

invalidate similarities at any level of interpretation? Wilber (1995:601 f.) reminds us that even Derrida conceded that his project of deconstruction, which is ruthless in its reminder of contextuality, does not deny the reality of transcendental signifieds. The fact that one language can be translated into another is possible precisely because there are signifieds that transcend the local contexts of both languages. This extralinguistic dimension of signifiers prevents us from being stuck within one language without any possibility of recognizing similarities in another. Language is not merely constructed or arbitrary<sup>60</sup>. Wilber, as we have seen, goes one step further by stating that these signifiers are themselves situated in stages, some are prerational, some rational, some transrational. Thus if Katz's claim was true, i.e. that there can be no transcendent signifieds in the mystical experiences, it would invalidate not only cross-cultural mystical claims, but ordinary cross-cultural communication as well. Mystical experiences, as it so happens, specifically those on the causal level, are radically formless. One would expect formlessness to be formless no matter "where" it occurs. Constructed forms do not enter into the actual mystical experience, says Wilber (1995:604). Even the word "experience" is not quite right, since the "subject/object duality of experiencer/experienced is at that moment dissolved." Pure Consciousness or pure Emptiness is not itself an *experience* but the ultimate openness in which experiences arise and pass. By keeping his critique on the rational level only, Katz attempts to make comments on spiritual referents (LL - psychic, subtle) without possessing, or at least using, the corresponding developmental signifieds (UL). Wilber's advice would be for him to take up the spiritual injunction or practice, see it through to the light of apprehension, and have it confirmed by a community of the adequate. Then statements such as "'on that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you... and [I will] show myself to [you]" (John

14:21), as an assertion of unlimited inter-relatedness, or Nonduality, or radical formlessness, or whatever conceptualisation is used as a finger pointing to the moon designed to frustrate and cut across concepts, cultures and religions, will become utterly obvious.

Steven Katz has done the study of mysticism a tremendous service with his insistence that the mystical experience, just like other experiences, is not entirely free of the conditioning that arises from the cultural, linguistic, historical, institutional and other contexts. This has brought some balance to the tendency to see the pre-interpreted mystical experience as utterly devoid of any cultural influences at all. Nevertheless, it seems as if Katz has gone too far by viewing these experiences as almost wholly prefabricated by cultural concerns. It is time to finally situate mysticism both beyond and within the waves of multi-levelled development. The inter-relation of culture/interpretation and the immediacy of apprehension interact with the wider world in order to find a gentler, more inclusive embrace, leading to that wholeness towards which the universe not wantonly, but wilfully, walks.

Having dealt with the hermeneutical question surrounding the issue of mystical experiences, we will need to deal with the serious question of whether using a hermeneutical framework that is fundamentally informed by Buddhist, and not specifically Christian thought patterns, can be used as a basis for addressing a specifically Christian problem. However, it makes sense to deal with this question once we have seen the benefits of his system in practice. We leave the question, therefore, over to our conclusion.

Wilber's integral hermeneutics offers to Christians one possible way of understanding the processes that allow them to be lifted out of the constraints imposed upon the Christian responsibility for dialogue by mythic imperialism into more rational structures. From here, we ask how the rational level itself can be transcended into a more inclusive, centauric level, and beyond to the subtle, causal and unmanifest realms. Our third, fourth and fifth chapters are dedicated to tracing this process of transcendence, and isolating the specific ways in which Christian responsibility to interfaith dialogue grows, transcends and matures.

# Chapter 3

## Mythic Rational Christian dialogical responsibility

It is usually helpful to begin at the beginning. The mythic rational level might be seen as offering the very first glimmerings of any meaningful Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue, even though it is still heavily influenced by the prepersonal, mythic level of Christian spirituality/faith, theology, hermeneutical interpretation and social organization. The previous levels, of course, do not bother with the complexities of dialogue. They desire simply to demolish God's enemies. Emerging out of this dark nightmare of uncritical self-centredness are the mythic rational Christians, who are the first to deal seriously with the question of their dialogical responsibilities towards other faiths.

We begin by clarifying the socio-cultural context in which Christians on the mythic rational level emerge in our world today. This context is, of course the inescapable reality of *religious pluralism* that is inextricably part of (post)modern living.

### 3.1 Religious Pluralism and Mythic Rational Christianity

Pluralism produces its own particular patterns of painfulness. Painful precisely because religious persons are no longer encamped within the confines of their own, all encompassing, perspectives. The doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, that posited the belief that outside the confines of Christianity people are doomed to eternal damnation, has largely informed the mythic rational Christian appraisal of other

faiths. It has also acted as a fundamentally important basis of the mythic rational “Atman project”, which is, recall, the self’s attempt to arrest development at its current level by creating and maintaining means of immortality at that level.

Nonetheless, ever since the first half of the twentieth century, the negative attitudes of Christians towards the religions have increasingly been replaced by a more accurate assessment of their value for their own faith communities as well as Christian communities. Yet, Christian absolutism dies hard, and is as vigorous today as the absolutisms found in politics (Fascism, Communism or even Democracy) and religion (Christianity, Islam or even Buddhism). A convinced absolutist Christian believes in and propagates an exclusivist Christianity not because the content or the Christ of her or his religion demands exclusivism, but because she or he exists and operates primarily from within the mythic rational level of dialogical development.

For Christians who remain convinced of the superiority and exclusivity of Christianity, perplexing questions will inevitably arise, provided they have the courage to face them. If God is One, why are there so many religions? Are all religions equally true? Equally false? Can one learn anything of value from other religions? Do they share commonalities? How should adherents of different faiths relate to one another? (Knitter 1985:1). Perhaps the urgent, overarching question, the one that forces Christians to look more closely at themselves and their religion, is this: how can people learn to live together productively and peacefully in today’s complexly interconnected world without the suspicions and tensions that may well erupt into a nuclear holocaust that would destroy everyone? (Kaufman in Hick & Knitter 1987:3).



Addressing this issue is a mammoth undertaking, and we are compelled to focus our attention on the question of a Christian responsibility towards dialogue that counters rather than contributes to the threat of the eventual destruction of the world.

More directly, then, the issue for us is that of Christian responses to religious plurality. Why has the understanding of the responsibility for interfaith dialogue been so varied, and how (in what direction) has there been development in this understanding of the responsibility towards dialogue? The encounter between Christianity and other religions is as old as the faith itself. We can reasonably assume that there have always been individual theologians and mystics who have speculated on the possible revelational value of other faiths and ideologies. Even the conviction that other faiths owe their existence to far more than purely diabolical or human factors is not new. This position has generally, however, been somewhat restricted to individuals within schools of thought that have, at best, been considered marginal, usually heretical. What is new then, is the extent and growing diversity of Christian thinkers who are rapidly experiencing a growing realization of the untenability of the classic Christian claims about the absolutistic nature of its own divinely given revelation of ultimate truth.

Christians have usually taken for granted that the fundamental truths that are needed for an ethically, rationally and spiritually ordered life are available and known in Scripture and the church's practices and traditions. When other religious or secular positions have been encountered, they have been seen as simply mistaken, and in need of reinterpretation in the light of accepted doctrine. This practice has served the church well, but now has come to be seen as not only faulty, but even dangerous.

Gordon Kaufman (in Hick & Knitter 1987:4) gives two reasons for this new position. The first is that many of these other orientations have very impressive resources for

orienting and interpreting human existence and giving a deep sense of meaning that suffices as well as Christianity for giving “significant formation to human life”.

Second, if communities continue to attempt to live largely inward looking, and so remain willing to destroy those we regard as enemies, we will only succeed in bringing to an end all human life on earth. “We must learn” he says, “instead to encounter these others on equal terms, seeking, as sympathetically as we can, to understand and appreciate both their insights into the human condition and the forms of belief and practice that they recommend and inculcate.”

However, is this position not, as Karl Barth would have it, merely a “howling with wolves” (in Cobb 1999:61)? Is it not a “deluge of neo-Gnosticism that places Jesus reverently into a pantheon of spiritual heroes”, and, as such, does it not need to be refuted and “struggled against” in the same way the church refuted the “apostasy of the Nazis’ Aryan doctrine” (Braaten 1992:13)? It is our desire not so much to refute or affirm any one of these positions (some of which we are now going to investigate in some detail) but rather to place them into a context that sees each as contributing its own unique perspective to the debate on dialogue. Yet, we also want to show the limitations in each position in the light of its own Omega point, that deeper context that includes and retains its positive contribution, yet transcends the limitations of its perspective given the wider, deeper holonic space in which it exists.

There has been in the last thirty years a plethora of excellent works on the issue of Christianity and religious pluralism<sup>61</sup>. Of the various attempts to categorize the Christian theological responses to the challenge of dialogue, possibly the neatest thus far has been that classification introduced by Alan Race (1983); exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Paul Knitter’s (1985) classification of Christian responses will also accompany us; the conservative evangelical, the mainline Protestant, the

Catholic and the theocentric views. These show reasonably close correlations with Race's model in that they share a developmental scheme for the responses of Christians to the assertions that theirs is not the only valid religion.

Ironically, the very Christianity that gave birth to the naming of the first and second millennium as such finds itself in a massive crisis at the dawning of the third. Just as the tomb of Jesus was found empty on that fateful third morning, Christianity too, has to find the courage to empty itself of the smothering tomb of past forms and outdated paradigms in order to emulate its Master's resurrection to deeper, transpersonal levels. A critique of Christianity is only possible because of an unshakable faith in the person and cause of Jesus Christ, and a desire to see the church still there at the dawn of the fourth millennium. Does the church stand any chance of this? Has Christianity not become both incredible and incomprehensible? The trend among many intellectuals is away from Christianity towards Eastern religions, towards groups concerned with religious, narcotic, political or material experiences. Their preference is a world of individual privacy without the inconvenience of communal responsibility. All too often with complete justification is Christ associated with the institutional church, authoritarianism, doctrinaire dictatorship, guilt and anxiety about sexuality, discrimination against women, discrimination against homosexuals, and condemnation of people of other faiths.

More to the point, what about those Christians whose structures of faith remain firmly entrenched within the mythic structures of belief, yet who themselves have cognitively evolved into the rational? For these people, many thousands in South Africa, millions around the world, modernity has created much anxiety, uncertainty and confusion. Tension has been created by a world in which modern science and philosophy are in direct opposition to their biblical understanding of the world. But

far worse than mere science and philosophy has been the near “apostasy” of modern biblical scholarship with its historico-critical methodology. So called “Christian” exegesis surely threatens to be the very destruction of the foundation of Christianity itself, questioning as it does some of the non-negotiable elements of mythic rational Christianity. These include its attack on the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, its disputing of Biblical authorship, along with its incessant attack on the doctrine of creation in six days and incredibly misled support for the Darwinian evolutionary idea of Man descending not directly from God, but via the apes.

An integral approach to Christian dialogue means an all quadrant, all levels examination of the people and institutions that are defined by the term “Christian”. Beginning with the mythic rational level, we might ask what is their perception of their *responsibility* to interfaith dialogue, defined as we have done in terms of theological methodology (UR), intersubjective interpretation of the other faiths (LL), social structures (LR) and interior spirituality (UL)?

## 3.2 Mythic rational theology of religions (UR Quadrant)

In this section, we wish to discover the root issues that inform the mythic rational response to, or theology of, interfaith dialogue.

The meaning of the word “rationality” is difficult to pin down<sup>62</sup>. Rationality according to Wilber (1995:173) means formal operational cognition, the capacity to not only think, but also think about one’s thinking. That is, to operate and reflect on one’s own thought processes and in so doing, transcend them by taking perspectives different to one’s own. This ability to reflect on one’s own thinking gives one the freedom to

justify one's own thoughts and actions based not only on what society says is right (conformist and sociocentric thought) but on reasons and evidence that may be contrary to popular or traditional thought. The rational realm is thus the beginning of amazing possibilities opening up new vistas and visions previously denied to the person through convention. For this *reason* (!) all true mysticism, according to Wilber (1995:174), has to be transrational, and is never prerational or antirational; "Right thought" always precedes "right meditation."

There are strong universalising tendencies inherent in rational truths, since they hold true in spite of culturally conditioned truths. A scientific truth established empirically, that is to say, in the Upper Right Quadrant, will be true whether conducted by a Xhosa speaker or an Afrikaner. Cultural truths (Lower Left Quadrant) are not thereby nullified, but it is only rationality that can hold these truths together as differing perspectives on a deeper and wider truth.

It is precisely at this point, then, at the meeting of mythological structures and rationality, where one of several reactions set in on the part of mythic believers. There might be a rejection of the evidence suggested by rationality through a retreat into the glories of times past. There can be the ideal response, which is the often very painful transcendence of the mythological level into the rational. Alternatively, there can be the attempt to prop up of the myths of the religion by using rational argumentation. It is this final reaction that gives rise to the mythic rational level. Among Christians today, this is most acutely observed in Christians who find themselves within the Protestant evangelical paradigm<sup>63</sup> but certainly not absent from Roman Catholicism, specifically among the "curialists" (see Küng 1992:116 ff.).

There are, then, at least three important foundations to a mythic rational theology of interfaith dialogue. There is first, this universalising tendency, or drive towards world embrace, theological oppositionalism and a rejection of contemporary hermeneutics.

### 3.2.1 World Embrace

The first of the mythic rational theological foundations is the drive towards unifying the world under its own auspices, or the *universalising tendency* of rationality.

Rationality *wants* to embrace and integrate a global or planetary consciousness.

However, this tendency is hampered, on this level, by the attempt to extend one particular mythology to embrace all, which almost inevitably means through, literally or figuratively, militaristic endeavours. Consider a Christian mythic rational evangelical rally, for example, a Billy Graham “World evangelical Crusade”. The very name taps into precisely these two tendencies. It says that if one were to adopt their mythological God as one’s own, then one will have access to being both a true believer of the faith and a true citizen of the empire, usually a reinterpretation of Christ’s image of the “Kingdom of God”. Erwin Lutzer (1994:203,205) beautifully illustrates the tension between the mythic rational level drive towards world embrace and the need to offer only one Saviour:

Given the proliferation of false religions, the distortions of the gospel, and the moral and spiritual decline in the West, it is easy to conclude that the purpose of God is failing in the world (but) Christ predicted that the end of the age would be characterized by anarchy and deception.... Since Christ is presented as the *only qualified Savior* for all the peoples of the earth, He is not the Savior of the West while there is another Savior for the East.... We must *become world Christians*; that is, believers who have a heart that extends beyond our immediate geographical limitations (*italics mine*).

Recall that the Atman Project, or over-riding need to protect the ego at this level is to find one's purpose within an ordered society. At the mythic rational level, this is achieved by imposing an authoritarian structure on to the world. We can, then, expect that theologies worked out on the mythic rational level would display militaristic tendencies. The fact that the religiously inspired myths of the different religions inevitably differ from one another is not seen as an opportunity to reassess one's own myth, but to declare all the others in error, and in need of one's own myth as a corrective for their own good.

Any mythology faces severe cultural, social and religious limitations, and, as a consequence, has a limited ability to incorporate any another into its interpretive framework through anything but conquest. The alternative would mean an abandonment of the particularistic tendencies of that myth in order for it to be transformed into a more globally reasonable approach – i.e. rational level. (Wilber 1995:176). However, this remains unthinkable for many mythic believers whose very salvation is unflinchingly believed to hinge on accepting that the myth itself is the Truth, that the myth itself conveys eternal salvation.

Nevertheless, there has in many instances been a profound break with a purely mythological approach to interfaith dialogue in which the truth of one's own religious myth is accepted without too much reflective analysis of precisely why it should be so. Be that as it may, the inherent desire to realize a universal salvation, in which all people share equally in the love, peace and fellowship of God that one observes in the evangelical crusades of mythic rational believers ought to be seen as a gain, as a crucial element in the deepening and growth of Christian responsibility towards other faiths.

### 3.2.2 Oppositionalism

It may seem a little more difficult to find the benefits in the second characteristic of mythic rational theologies – oppositionalism. “The Holy Spirit is well-qualified to overcome opposition to the gospel message,” says Lutzer (1994:204) in one example of oppositionalism. What is observed is the clinging to the exclusivity of the truth claims of the mythological forms of one’s faith, which results in the unshakable belief in the non-ambiguity of the truth concerning God. This means that their truth must not only be authoritative, but also exclusive. Now, it is strongly tempting to want to make exclusivism the hallmark of the mythic rational level, but this would be too simplistic. Even those operating out of the rational or postrational levels can, and indeed sometimes need to, insist on the exclusivity of certain propositional theological truths. What is thus specific to this level is the *oppositional stance* taken towards others. The mythic rationalist cannot be open to another religion’s truth claims about ultimate reality without losing everything that is dear to her or him. Therefore, there is a vigorous rejection of everything that could possibly challenge the veracity of their claims.

What does it mean that oppositionalism is a hallmark of the theologies of interfaith dialogue at the mythic rational level? Following Marty (in Küng and Moltmann 1992:3 ff.) it means that, among other things, there is a rejection of form criticism and historical-critical exegesis of Scripture<sup>64</sup>, in fact a rejection of hermeneutics generally. There is a rejection of pluralism and relativism, an opposition to evolution and development, and a leaning towards apocalyptic millennialism. Historical and empirical sciences are acknowledged to the degree that they coincide with the Bible,



since, like God Himself, the Word is free of error and infallible. Theologies that are founded on anything but these premises are rejected, for they contradict the Bible by putting its infallibility into question. Creationists who reject the theory of evolution will provide their own scientific evidence, or reinterpret existing scientific discoveries to show that the world was in fact created six or seven thousand years ago. Moltmann (1992:110), going one step further than Marty, shows that it is not “blind antimodernism” nor even mere “oppositionalism” that informs the mythic-rational position, but rather the desire to interpret everything in the world according to their overarching hermeneutical fundamentals. These are, of course, the infallibility of the Word of God, and both salvation and revelation through Jesus Christ alone.

The third foundation of a theology of dialogue on the mythic rational level is the rejection of contemporary hermeneutics. There will be some overlap in this next section with the Lower Left Quadrant, or Christian interpretive, hermeneutical *responsibility*. A clear distinction between theology and the hermeneutics that support that theology is not always possible, or even desirable, but the general distinction still holds even with some overlapping.

### 3.2.3 Rejection of contemporary Hermeneutics

Let us be reminded that not all those who exist at the mythic rational level are necessarily fundamentalists. This general level has existed for thousands of years, and most clearly displayed in the rise of the imperially developed civilizations, according to Habermas (in Wilber 1995:176). Fundamentalism, on the other hand, is a relatively new phenomenon. Nevertheless, within contemporary Protestant Christianity, which

for the purposes of this thesis is a key focus, the mythic rational level of dialogue expresses itself primarily in the shape of fundamentalism, which has arisen primarily as a reaction against modernity's many negative influences on these faith communities (in Küng and Moltmann 1992:110).

In these mythic rational communities, there is a marked rejection of the type of theological hermeneutics that has informed Christian thinking in modernity. Whilst they may admit that not all the paradoxes and difficulties in biblical texts have been fully understood, the notion that the text might have multivocal meanings is strongly resisted. Also unacceptable is the suggestion that the presuppositions that the reader brings to the text colour their interpretation of the text. Not well received either is the notion that one's reading of a particular text is influenced substantially by the larger whole in which that text exists.

In order to maintain the integrity of the truth of the text, the mythic rationalist chooses to live his or her faith in spite of the perspectivalism, phenomenological bracketing, and assumptions that individual and subjective experiences colour and help predetermine one's reading of the text, all of which, ironically, would be quite normal in other areas of the believer's life. Thus, for example, a person who manages the IT department of a bank, whose expertise in the field presupposes that she has developed, and continually uses, these skills in her business environment, is expected to ignore those skills while attending a church service involving a Benny Hinn healing crusade, with all its attendant abuses of scriptural interpretation, self-aggrandisement and money-making showmanship.

Where then, does truth reside for the mythic rationalist? It is, quite normally, in the literal meaning of the text as it has been revealed to those who (or so it is believed) are guided by the Holy Spirit, and who are acting both responsibly and in good faith.

The certainty of faith, then, is purchased at the cost of handing one's own decision to a divine authority, what Erich Fromm (1956) has called an "escape from freedom". As a generalisation, one might say that for Protestant Christian mythic rationalists, this authority has become the Bible, which is interpreted as the divine Word of God, and like God Himself, is by its very nature free of error and fallibility. The God of truth and love reveals himself in a form that is available to ordinary people in ordinary language.

Following Sandeen and Marsden, Marty (in Küng and Moltmann 1992:6) traces the influences of Baconian inductivism and Scottish common sense on fundamentalist thinking. This approach argues that ordinary people, making use of their ordinary senses, can gain knowledge of the real world if they act responsibly. Nineteenth century Protestantism, using these *creencias* (ideas so closely held that one does not know one has them, for they "have" the person), became self-confident about their hold on truth. Since God's will has been made known in Scriptures, it is the theologian's task to systematise the historical and literary facts as *the* truth. Any reasoning that takes place operates under the premise that the commandments of Scripture are true without having to give a rational answer for why this is so. This is so precisely because Scripture has a total claim over mere human reasoning, and does not have to answer to autonomous human reasoning. It is more important for the individual or community to be subjected to the Word than for the Word to be subjected to human exegesis, for the truth contained therein "is timeless and need not constantly be interpreted and presented anew," observes Moltmann (1992:111). The truth of revelation in the Word "does not argue, but asserts. It does not call for insight, but subjection. It is not concerned with a hermeneutical problem but with a power struggle: either God's Word or the 'spirit of the age'".

Since the basic premises of hermeneutics challenges all of these assumptions, the emphasis on, and preoccupation with, *meaning* it is seen as a system that is used by liberals to compromise or alter the divine Word. Resisting hermeneutics becomes the God-ordained duty of the mythic rationalist in his or her attempt to maintain the absolutes of the authoritative Word of God.

An encounter with this anti-hermeneutical stance is a source of much frustration for those who attempt to engage with it theologically. Dialogue defined in terms of being an open encounter, which implies the risk of someone actually changing his or her mind, is not likely, if not impossible. This is because the mythic rationalist feels that any concession given on his or her part in one area of belief would mean the collapse of the entire system of meaning. Thus, the entire meaning gestalt is clung to, and the very act of clinging is itself viewed as a sure sign of uncompromising faithfulness to the Word of God.

Theologically then, there is a strict adherence to the view that salvation is due to the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This salvation can only be gained through the participation in the Christian faith, never through the false teaching that non-Christian religions and worldviews are also ways of salvation. A “give-and-take” dialogue with other religions can never be substituted for the necessary and powerful proclamation of the Gospel that aims at the conversion of the world into the church and into the Kingdom of God. If non-Christians die without a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, they are doomed to perish in the eternal fires of hell, even if God will, somehow, give each well-meaning pagan the chance to hear about Jesus, or perhaps Jesus himself in the afterlife (this is by no means certain). Because Jesus alone is the only mediator between God and humanity, the Way, the Truth and the

Life, any sort of syncretistic move towards universalism, humanism that de-emphasises evangelism is rejected as an ideology of this world inspired by Satan and his minions on earth. Interfaith dialogue, at best, is a means of first understanding a person before converting them, in other words, to first “unmask to heathendom all false religions as sin against God...”(in Knitter 1985:79-80). The dialogian has the *responsibility* of making this theological stance unambiguously clear to his or her community of faith, and it is to the explication of this responsibility to which we now proceed.

### 3.3 Mythic Rational intersubjective cultural patterns of dialogue (Lower Left Quadrant)

This self-confident hold on the Truth among mythic rationalists finds much support in the intersubjective, cultural interpretive structures that make up the level. Wilber (1995:224,225) reminds us that while the preoperational world is egocentric and geocentric, the concrete operational world is sociocentric. Here, the self is centred not so much on a bodily identity, but on a role identity within the community. On this level, we find the conventional stages of morality (Kohlberg and Gilligan), belongingness needs (Maslow) and the conformist mode (Loevinger).

The pathology of this stage tends to be a script pathology where “one is having trouble, not with the physiosphere [psychoses], not with the biosphere [borderline and neuroses] – rather, one is stuck in the early roles and scripts given by one’s parents, one’s society, one’s peers.” The therapy needs to find these scripts and expose them as myths in the light of more mature reason and more accurate information, thus

“rewriting the script.” Before the mythological “scripts” are rewritten, however, they may find themselves strengthened by the newly emerging rational level, thus creating a worldview that rejects the need to engage other faiths on the rational level, but seeks to conquer those faiths by bringing them into its own interpretive framework.

### 3.3.1 Arrested development: prophets and power

Cultural transformations tend to find their origins in the Upper Left Quadrant of an individual – the awakening of that individual’s cognitive potential to the higher levels available that can be accessed. This realization is then established within a micro-community of the similarly depthed. This new and initially marginalized level then becomes part of the broader, collective worldview, the Lower Left. Once the movement becomes broadly accepted, it is then concretised in the Lower Right Quadrant as the social and religious institutions that propagate that worldview, which in turn helps to foster and socialize the individuals within the community and so on through succeeding generations.

In the case of Christianity then, the initial impulse for the Christian religion was Jesus’ *Abba* experience which lead to his calling of the first disciples into an initially small micro-community. Yet the depth of Jesus’ own realization was not and could not be sustained, and Christianity arose in the general era of mythic imperialism, and today remains largely clothed in structures, worldviews and ethics that are at least two epochs behind the times, that is, the fully rational and planetary or centauric epochs (see Wilber 1995:580).

The worldview of the fundamentalist Christian exists compartmentalized from that of the “fallen world”. This is the same world that has seen the transformation of many of

its individuals into formal operational thinking (UL) with the accompanying growth into a commonly held rational worldview (LL), which, for the most part was due to the Enlightenment. Modern states have arisen from their divisive mythologies leading to a formal recognition of each other thus making room for the other. There has been the all-important separation of church and state within most of Christianity. Yet, while all this forms the basis of normal living for the fundamentalist Christian in daily life, the demands of the mythic rational faith that require members of other religions to be viewed as targets of conversion to what is perceived to be the whole truth in its mythic Christianity ("you must be born-again"). This is in spite of the affirmation of religious freedom as a positive good (see Volf in Küng and Moltmann 1992:105). Mythic rationalists tend to work from within a self-confident hold on the whole truth. What is often felt to be the only truly necessary theological endeavour for the community to work out is to discover what is meant by being "guided by the Holy Spirit." The perspective that provides the theological answers for this question is most often a thoroughly reworked biblical *prophetic* paradigm.

Perhaps the most common interpretive framework within mythic rationalism, then, is that of the "prophet of God". Prophets in Old Testament times, it is believed, received their revelations directly from God, placing them in an entirely other class from the common people who had still to work out their thoughts using various intellectual, moral and religious norms. The Spirit communicates directly what the prophet should say. It is given to the prophet alone to speak the words of God that would otherwise be unheard by others. The Scriptural foundation for this approach is taken from verses such as 2 Peter 1:21: "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit of God." That all of scripture was formed in this way is beyond dispute. The same principle is now applied to the words

of the contemporary prophet. The characteristics of God-inspired scripture and prophecy are to be strictly upheld; its *verbal* nature, *supernatural* nature, *inerrancy*, and *infallibility*.

The irony of course is that a careful reading of the Old Testament prophecies themselves reveals a marked lack of concern over infallibility and accuracy.

“Prophecy,” maintains Barr (1984:29) “Was not concerned about accuracy, but with communicating the will and judgement of God. The belief that the prophetic paradigm supports ideas of accuracy and inerrancy can be maintained only if the actuality of what Old Testament prophets were like is ignored.”

The unquestionable authority and power that the self-styled prophets of the mythic rational level have over the congregational life becomes apparent to even the casual observer. The very sense of the individual’s self-worth is seriously challenged when subjected to this paradigm through the seductive promise of getting God’s direct opinion on difficult areas of life without having to resort to the often arduous struggle with texts, biblical interpretation, and living with the paradoxes of life. Such power over the lives of the flock is difficult to release. This gives the self-styled “prophet” tremendous power over the group, and may well lead to abuses.

### 3.3.2 Rejecting religious pluralism

Not all Christian evangelicals are necessarily mythic rationalists, but they do share a position that among other factors defines the mythic rational worldview, the rejection of the legitimacy of religious pluralism. Following David Barrett’s (in Knitter 1992:77) classification of developments within Evangelicalism, we will find Fundamentalists, Conservative Evangelicals, and the Ecumenical or New



Evangelicals<sup>65</sup>. What all of these groupings hold in common is the consistent application of the principles of the primary authority of the Bible as either inerrant or infallible or both, the universal Lordship of Jesus as the only Saviour and means of universal salvation, and the necessity of mission whose primary function is to bring people to salvation in the name of Jesus<sup>66</sup>.

This evangelical model of understanding the other religions is highlighted by the *Frankfurt Declaration* (1970), which won the approval of evangelicals across the world. Salvation, it maintains, is due in its entirety to the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and can be achieved only through participation in this event through faith. The insistence on the need for a direct, personal encounter with Jesus as Lord for salvation cannot be compromised. Any suggestion that non-Christian religions might also be ways of salvation is a false teaching. Any attempt to substitute dialogue - which implies the possibility of the Christian position being inferior, equal or otherwise inadequate in relation to other paths - for the proclamation of the gospel that aims specifically at conversion, must be rejected as a "prostitution of the gospel" (Knitter 1985:79).

Rex Mathie's (n.d.) proves himself, in his evangelical tract called "*Christ among the gods*", to be an excellent example a person who seems to have several lines of personal development (morality, affects, spirituality) having reached a (post?) rational level, yet whose theology is worked out from firmly within a mythic rational perspective. This tract provides a very useful insight into the way insights gleaned from rational and post-rational thinking by dialogians on the mythic rational level are strained through the sieve of their mythic rational worldview.

Mathie begins by conceding the *cultural* riches brought to South Africa by Asian, Zulu and Western influences. He would not want to change given the way these have

positively shaped our worldviews. He is, however, strongly opposed to *religious* pluralism. This he defines as “the belief that the differences between religions are not a matter of truth and falsehood, but merely differences of perception of the one universal truth” (Mathie n.d. 3). The lack of decisive theological opposition to what he terms “demonstrably ‘New Age’ teachings” that have had such a powerful influence on Christian thought, is due, he believes, to the confusion brought about by “European Protestant intellectuals” and a “bankrupt liberal Protestantism,” whose programs of demythologisation have removed all that is transcendental and mystical from the Gospel. “In their radical retionalism (*sic*) of the Gospel, they replaced the supernatural with religious platitudes” (Mathie n.d. 3).

There is strong evidence of the pre/trans fallacy in Mathie’s statements attacking rationality. The pre/trans fallacy, recall, is the confusion of prerational magic and myth with postrational mystery, or the God that is beyond all understanding. Since both the prerational and the postrational share the characteristic of being nonrational, they are confused by anyone who does not clearly understand or make provision for the differences. Mathie’s Christian theological education has prepared him perfectly well for understanding that the whole majesty and mystery of God cannot be captured in the human imagining. It has also made very clear what is prerational, magical New Ageism that often seems very holistic but in reality is deeply narcissistic. But what it has not afforded him is the means of distinguishing between genuine transpersonal growth, expressed in a myriad ways that transcend his mythic rational Christianity, and prerational narcissism. Thus, any expression of very God that does not fit into his own particular experience, Christian worldview or interpretation of God will, by default, be reduced to the workings of “other gods” or the devil and His Minions. Added to this confusion is an inability to tell whether a spiritual practice is in fact

truly evil, which is not a discountable possibility, or merely an expression of a lack of spiritual, cognitive and other, development.

Mathie takes this confusion even further in his commentary concerning pluralism. A pre-rational, mythological level religion such as primitive Hinduism<sup>67</sup> is considered from the perspective of his Christianity. Since Vedanta, or Mahayana Buddhism, or for that matter, fully rational form of Christianity do not necessarily share his demand for confessing the absolute supremacy of Christ, they are simply treated as being on a par with early Hinduism.

Mathie (n.d. 9, 10), following McGrath, rationally argues for the failure of religious in two primary areas. First, pluralism leads to an uncertainty of who God really is. This leads to a “multiplicity of gods akin to the polytheism of the Roman empire, all made in their image”. Second, pluralism engages in a process of “reductionist libertinism” that degrades the Christological and soteriological efficacy of the faith as it tries to accommodate other religious traditions. This occasions a passionate plea for young minds to be “captured for the truth found in Christ” (n.d. 12).

The image of being “captured” is instructive. Mathie himself remains consciously well within the realms of safety offered by what Krüger (1995:22) calls the “coerced unity” of dogmatism and conformity. There are shortcomings of the rational approaches to understanding other faiths, and these exist because there are limitations inherent in every level. Mathie, however, takes these as evidence of the poverty of the rational approaches to interfaith issues and of the correctness of his own mythic-rational beliefs. Yet, there is no suggestion of his engaging in a critical analysis of his own position, or asking whether the shortcomings of the pluralist approaches might not lead to different conclusions to those he and McGrath suggest. Could their short

fallings not, in other words, be a necessary part of their transcendence to a postrational level of understanding the other faiths?

Again, it should be noted that Mathie is not opposed to rationality *per se*. He goes so far as to insist on the explicit need to give *reasons* for the “compelling truth” (n.d. 12) of Christian superiority, just as Paul did in Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus (see Acts 17:2-3, 18:4,9). Mathie understands very well the concept of pluralism, and the potential benefits that it offers for a life lived in common among a large number of diverse peoples in close proximity. Yet, tied to a fundamentally mythic rational paradigm, he cannot allow himself to conceive of the possibility that adherents of other faiths might be following something other than “pseudo-deities” and “false gods.” Even less can he concede, without threatening his entire mythic-level faith system, that these faiths might offer to Christianity insight on areas where it does not understand the full mystery of God. This is because Christianity itself, not God, not Jesus, but *Christianity* is “true truth” (n.d. 13). The certainty of his faith is based on the firm foundation of God’s Word, free from error and infallible. The content of this Word, as attested to by the Bible, cannot be subjected to exegesis and thus falsified. Revelation asserts in that calls less for insight than for subjection to its eternal truths. Revelation is not so much concerned about the hermeneutical problem as with a cosmic power struggle that pits God’s Word against the spiritual forces of this world. This faith in authority, that the young minds of today ought to submit to, is not just irrational, but anti-rational (Moltmann 1992:111). Rationality is thus to be employed to order the truth of Christianity, but not to dispute this truth or to discover whether these truths do in fact hold up for all peoples at all times.

In Wilber's terms, Mathie's spiritual line of development remains stuck within the mythic rational level even though his social, intellectual, emotional and other lines have developed into the deeper rational and centauric levels. His rejection of any possibility of there being salvific value in other faiths faithfully follows the standard mythic rational level technique of, firstly, fusing pluralism and relativism, and secondly, rejecting both in the attempt to rise above the confusion and erosive effect of perspectival thought. Marty (in Küng and Moltmann 1992:6) makes an interesting observation:

The fundamentalist [mythic rationalist] who encounters admitted hermeneuts [rational/centauric level] is either bemused or scornful: how can you read the text I do, and not come to the same understanding as I? You must be operating in the bad faith which characterizes liberalism and which compromises or alters the divine word. The fundamentalist in reacting this way may be doing so in good faith, making a serious effort to introduce or, as he or she would put it, reintroduce absolutes and the authoritative Word on the theological scene. Follow such absolute and authoritative readings, says the fundamentalist, and we can agree.

Until the mythic rationalist has done the hard work of breaking through into the rational level of being, they cannot fully understand the perspectival and aperspectival approach to other faiths that would enable the person to understand the liberation that pluralism does in fact offer from dogmatic fiefdom.

### 3.4 Social structures of mythic rational Christianity (Lower Right Quadrant)

Wilber (1995:370) reminds us that modernity is characterised by the fact that Reason (formal operational thought) and not myth is the basic organizing principle of society

itself. The two trends that are characteristic of modernity echo the strident call of the Enlightenment philosophers. The first of these Wilber calls the “good news” of modernity,” the demand that there be “no more myths!”

The Enlightenment mentality, with its rational demand for evidence, burst asunder the closed circle of the mythological world and deconstructed its cultural worldspace in no uncertain terms – and did so by asking, in each and every case, “How do you know Moses parted the Red Sea?” “Because it says so in the Bible” – where for a thousand years that would have been an irrefutable and unchallengeable answer, it now impressed no one...And so some two thousand years after mythic membership society had forced the first great proponent of Reason to drink hemlock, the first Reason-oriented societies now turned on their mythic predecessors with a vengeance (Wilber 1995:371).

As individuals began to emerge from a role identity into an ego identity, the social dominator hierarchies, headed by God and King, began to fall, often through bloody combat. This move from a sociocentric and conventional morality saw the rise of a postconventional and worldcentric morality with its demands for free and equal subjects of civil law, morally free subjects, and politically free subjects as citizens of a democratic state. “Postconventional” meaning, recall, that the answer “It’s true because the Bible says so,” which had been for thousands of years an irrefutable argument, now became open to various interpretations, discussion and debate.

“Worldcentric” meaning that not only one’s self, one’s tribe or one’s nation (religious or political) occupied the centre of concern, but societies and worldviews considered to this point as “other” also become subjects of equal concern.

The bad news of modernity though, was that “no more myths” came also to mean “no more spiritual ascent”. The religion of the pre-rational levels are overly concerned by a yearning for an otherworldly, metaphysical reality. In Judeo-Christian terms this meant a religion driven by geocentric, egocentric, anthropocentric local volcano god

called Yahweh or Almighty and victorious God the Father. Since rational science began to collapse everything in the Left Quadrants into their Right Hand correlates, its positivistic demand for evidence from religion could not be met as empirical, observable fact. Rationality allowed for the ascent from myth to reason only, but no further. Meaning was to be sought after only in the plenitude of this-worldly search. It challenged the upward-yearning, mythological ascenders by becoming this-worldly descenders, searching for salvation in only the glories of the visible world. Thus we see the battle lines being drawn between the ascenders and descenders, the former accusing the latter of being materialists, hedonists, reductionists, pantheists, and the latter accusing the former of being repressive, puritanical, life-denying, sex denying and body ignoring (Wilber 1995:346).

This meant that whilst rationality brought about the *differentiation* of Kant's "Big Three"<sup>68</sup> of science, art and morality (each could now pursue its own course without dogmatic, mythological interference), reason was unable to *integrate* them at all. This would require the further development into vision-logic.

What rationality had put asunder, vision-logic would unite. Or that, at any rate, is the potential and the promise and the struggle of postmodernity.... This is the postmodern integrative vision we have mentioned...in connection with Gehser ("integral-aperspectival"), Habermas (whose theory of communicative action is specifically designed to integrate the Big Three), and Heidegger's centauric being-in-the-world (and) in Foucault's systematic use of vision-logic to map exteriors of epistemes (Wilber 1995:393).

This is getting somewhat ahead of the story, but today, a real problem of integration exists for many Christians who have been born into this world of rationality, yet whose religious creeds and dogmas were formulated in mythological terms. In the often scary world of options that seem endless to the point of bafflement, many opt

for a retreat into the perceived certainties of mythic-rationalism; “only believe, and you will be saved.”

In a world where scientific rationalism has brought about not the initially promised utopia of unending Progress, but rather threats of ecological and nuclear meltdown, the first faltering steps towards mythic-rational fundamentalism turned into a mad rush for certainty. The editors of the modernist *Christian Century* laughed at the hollowness and artificiality of the fundamentalist movement of the 1920's, according to Miroslav Volf (in Küng and Moltmann 1992:97). However, it has now worked its way from the fringes of Protestantism to being one of the most influential ways of propagating much of present-day Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic.

Let the Christian at the rational level of development or later beware. In the face of the uncertainties of modernity, which ought to act as a spur towards deeper faith, greater inner peace amidst the outer storm, many individuals, who start out at the rational stage with its self-esteem needs, may well begin to regress towards conformist-belongingness-conventional modes. Here, individuality is shunned for a group ego that begins to demand allegiance. The individual's right to logical inquiry is replaced by the demand for conformity to the myth, especially as espoused by the dynamic group leader who claims to hear the voice of the Lord far more effectively than any one person in the group does. Rational enquiry into the leader's interpretations is shunned by the imposition of the group's desire for consensus. On this level, the individual accepts the norms of the group and there can be no exceptions. Contrast this with the postconventional, or rational stage, in which a person may or may not embrace what the group decides not out of blind conformity, but from a rational consideration and with reference to conscience.



How does this play itself out sociologically, that is, in the concrete structures that constitute the LR Quadrant at the mythic rational level?

### 3.5.1 Christian social development (Lower Right Quadrant)

Common to all fundamentalist reactions to the modern secularisation of society is the attempt to restore the unitary religious state, and to do so by religious imperialism. These longed-for unitary religious states would have a missionary and messianic foundation. This would result not only in a state that was fundamentally political in nature, it would also provide the religious legitimacy for the political and a military means of ensuring that both the religion and the state was “absolute and free of doubt” (Moltmann in Küng and Moltmann 1995:112).

Let us trace the development of the Christian sociological structures in the LR Quadrant, that is, the visible, sociological structures that parallel the development of the collective interior, or culture (LL). We have seen that in the magical structure of society, personal identity was natural and body based, with collective identity being supported by kinship, or blood lineages from a common ancestor. With the advent of mythological structures, personal identity switched to role identity while the collective identity was based on a political ruler that was legitimated by a common mythology that saw a close connection between the ruler and God. Habermas (in Wilber 1995:171/2) reminds us that the unity brought about by mythic membership could integrate a host of different tribes into a sociocentric-objectivistic world conception of the stage of concrete operations [and conventional-stage morality].”

The next stage up in the LR developmental schema is rationality, which as we know has powerful universalising tendencies. This means that rationality has the capacity to

be far more integrative than often very divisive mythologies. Rationality tends towards embracing and integrating a global consciousness that makes room for many different mythologies. But the first step in this universalising stage tended to be the rational extension of a particular mythology into every corner of the world using all the power available to it. Thus the rise of the empires saw the attempt firstly to conquer the enemy/unbeliever militarily, but then secondly to offer them genuine equality as equal citizens, provided that they embrace the victors' particular religion and worldview. All Christians whatever their race or sex are equally saved, but all Muslims and Buddhists will go to hell for not accepting the Lord Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.

The massive internal contradictions of the Enlightenment are a direct result of the inherent limitations of rationality, some of which we will investigate later. The massive uncertainties brought about by modernity has led many to desire a retreat to the romanticised certainties of the past when faith seemed so much surer and less complicated. For then, surely, the certainties of faith were based on the firm foundation of the Divine Word of God, a revelation that was free from error and infallible? The historical and empirical sciences are still acknowledged, but rejected to the degree they conflict with this timeless authority. Moltmann (in Küng and Moltmann 1995:110) says that the terms "oppositionalism" or "antimodernism" do not adequately describe the phenomenon of Creationists forming their own "scientific" institute to demonstrate that the world was created 6 000 years ago. Since divine revelation cannot be subjected to human reason, the primal document of that revelation cannot be subject to human exegesis. Questions of the historical conditioning of its origins and the hermeneutical problems it poses to the present day reader are irrelevant. "A fundamentalism of revelation does not argue, but asserts,"

says Moltmann (in Küng and Moltmann 1995:111). "It is not concerned with a hermeneutical problem, but with a power struggle: either God's Word, or the spirit of the age." The existence of the Roman Christian mythic empire was itself a stage-specific and appropriate level of social integration. And it provided for a particularly cohesive social order. Not surprising, after all, given the risk to members of being burnt at the stake for challenging its dogmatic assertions backed by all the persuasive power wielded by the religious state. Christians at the mythic rational level would find that this is precisely the type of church structure that would naturally develop if the advances of the Enlightenment were reneged through the fear that other faiths might have something of value to say.

Rational and postrational levels of Christianity are open to Christians, indeed, they have been since Jesus demonstrated in his person and ministry his utterly nondual awareness of interrelated unity with the ultimate and radical Being/Emptiness that he called "Abba." But Jesus represents the ultimate mode of consciousness, whereas the average mode of consciousness in Christianity to this day is stuck at the mythic rational. Those who choose to return to the constraints of the mythic rationalism, or who have never transcended this level, simply do not see the reason why others should not become Christians, as they understand the term.

The idea of another person not embracing their mythology is a painful one, for they are convinced that without being saved, they are doomed to a horrid spiritual end. The fact that the rational level too provides for excellent social and religious cohesion is incomprehensible. "Every structure of consciousness is suspicious of all higher structures, structures lying within and beyond it, structures that are in fact its own inherent potential, but structures that require a frightening death and rebirth to unfold in each case" (Wilber 1995:351/2).

The tendency of the lower levels is to strain the teachings and realizations of the higher levels through its own particular framework. Wilber (1995:353) suggests that the need for various reasons including social cohesion and control, the mythic rational Church could not allow for the fact that Jesus' realization of unity with the Father belonged to everyone absolutely equally and fully. "The Kingdom of God is within you" <sup>69</sup> was interpreted downward and seamlessly tucked into the prevailing mythology, which saw salvation for only God's chosen people. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life came to mean Jesus as the group in "the know" apprehended and taught him, not the Jesus that comes to each person in an utterly unique, often surprising, and always unrepeatable way. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* came to be the glue of imperial-political cohesion for the mythic empire.

Wilber (1995:353f) regards the dogma of the utterly unique and nonreproducible realization of Jesus in a rather poor light. "Never before" he says,

has a causal [nondual] realization been translated so dramatically downward [and] produced *so few same-level realizations in its followers...* The peculiar and net effect of all this was that, although the God of the Church was primarily an Ascending God...*there was no way to consummate the Ascension*, not even for the leading-edge few; only Jesus had done that. And while we might to varying degrees 'participate' in Christ's nature, there could be no true and whole-bodied Realization and Ascension until after death, at some other time, and certainly in some other world [which locked the West] into a perpetually frustrated Ascendant yearning – a yearning for a goal that would never be allowed.

There could only be a "participation in Christ's nature" and not the access to Christ's consciousness of union with the Divine. The "glue" at this new, mystical level is completely misunderstood at the mythic rational level, since the developmental stage in the UL Quadrant, or spirituality, which would allow the individual to realize what Jesus was saying, has not yet been achieved. Any person who together with Jesus

says, "I and my Father are one" would immediately be equated with the workings of previously transcended levels – the magical – and strongly condemned and resisted. This pattern of misunderstanding may also occur in the higher levels, for example, the centauric or subtle levels, but the higher the transcendence, the less the likelihood of the pre/trans fallacy occurring.

There is every possibility, however, of a mythic rationalist simply confusing members of a micro-community such as an Ashram or monastery, who are actively breaking through into the higher realms of development, with a regressive religious group such as Jonestown, Synanon, Scientology, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and the Unification church among others, whom Anthony *et al.* (1987:10-25) quite rightly regard as pre-rational and regressive. The point is that Christians at the mythic rational level of development struggle to clearly assess the efficacy of these group's spiritual practices for spiritual development. A very normal strategy would be to regard all non-Christian, and many advanced Christian groupings as New Age, and misled by Satan and his minions.

An integral approach to the question of a religious group's authenticity would seek a far more discerning approach to other faiths. It will try to discover if the group was *archaic* - with self-other indissociation, primary narcissism, oral needs and even cannibalistic or murderous/ suicidal tendencies. Perhaps the group is *magical* – with a belief in the omnipotence of thought rituals (voodoo), emotional sexual (Oedipal) impulses, magic beliefs, and self-clan confusion (totemism). Perhaps the group is *mythical* with its intense conformity needs, a cosmic parent worldview, a lack of rational justification and strong distinction between in-group of the saved, and out-group of the damned. Perhaps the group's sociological level is *rational* or even

beyond, reaching truly transcendent (*psychic, subtle and causal*) levels of organization (see Wilber in Anthony *et al.* 1987:244,245).

It is difficult then, to talk about interfaith dialogue in any meaningful way at the mythic rational level. Given the conservative evangelical assumption of the inerrancy of the Bible, the exclusivity of Christianity, and the lostness of those outside of its walls, “dialogue” with members of other faith traditions is misleading. Dialogue becomes a mechanism through which to deliver and propagate a message that is unalterable and not open to correction. Dialogue at this level has its own definition and function as pointed out by Samartha (in Hick & Knitter 1987:71f.): “The dialogic method is necessary if those who witness to Christ are to engage the minds of their listeners (since) we seek both to disclose the inadequacies and falsities of non-Christian religions and to demonstrate the adequacy and truth, the absoluteness and finality of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

If conservative evangelical Christians are to avoid the mistakes of the past, it is crucial that they clearly understand the consequences of the mythic social structures through which it has already travelled. Augustine, as a convinced Neo-Platonist worked without ceasing for a united church, was tormented by the continued existence of the schisms created by the Donatist controversy. Yet even he was impressed by the efficacy of crude force, and so became instrumental in creating a theological justification for forced conversions, the Inquisition and holy war against Christians, schismatics, and non-Christians. This, according to Hans Küng (1995:291-2, 391-403), laid the foundation for the medieval church system with its five main characteristics; centralization, legalism, politicization, militarization, and clericalization. Here we have a purely mythic structure of social organization came well after what Küng calls the *early Christian apocalyptic paradigm*, as well as the

*early church Hellenistic paradigm*, both which could be shown to be in their development well beyond the mythic levels of social organization.

Jesus showed little regard for the hierarchy of patriarchal structures and traditions. He demonstrated this by calling women to be his disciples, and with his high regard of children. The earliest church, then could have called itself democratic, in the sense of being opposed to aristocratic or monarchical, precisely as a community founded in freedom and equality in Christ. This early community, according to Küng (1995:82) wanted expressly to avoid relationships of domination in its use of the unreligious word, bereft of authority or position, *diakonia*, or “serving at table,” as the irrevocable standard of social standing with one another.

In terms of our levels of development, the early church structure was well beyond the merely rational level, and possibly at the centauric level or beyond given its insistence on equality between Jew and non-Jew, male and female, old and young. The point though, is that just because a religious social system has its beginning at a higher level, it does not mean that it will stay there or deepen. Many Christian social structures have, very clearly, moved down the holarchical scale since those early times, and some are at the mythic rational. Some have begun to develop back up so that each level, mythic rational, rational, centauric and beyond, can be found in various congregations, denominations and groups today.

### 3.6 The Mythic Rational Stage of Interiority (Upper Left Quadrant)

We turn now to the Upper Left quadrant, the interiority of the individual Christian dialogian. Here we desire to enter, as it were into the very heart of the dialogian's response-*ability* of the mythic-literal Christian. For the dialogian at this level, interfaith dialogue is an issue of right faith, and this is no game. At stake is one's eternal salvation, literally the choice between life and death. In an attempt at entering into the very thought processes in what, by definition at this level, threatens to be an overwhelmingly serious issue, I should like to follow Wilber (2000:135,145) in trying to describe the mythic rational (and later the rational) level of consciousness from the inside, or from the first-person or "I" perspective. Note that while Wilber has and does concentrate on consciousness in general, I will be focussing specifically on how the person experiences their faith on each level. By creating a short story to represent what the world of faith looks like from the inside, hopefully this Quadrant will become more accessible and serve as a template for our discussion of faith on this level.

I believe that the Old and New Testament are the inspired and thus inerrant, infallible Word of God, the absolute touchstone of everything to be said and done in Christianity.<sup>70</sup> I also believe that the Scriptures require us to view other religions as the flawed attempts of man to reach God through human efforts and insight. If God has a plan to save men without personal faith in Christ, He has not seen fit to reveal it. Our role is to spread the Gospel with the firm conviction that faith comes by hearing, and hearing the preached Word of God as revealed to us in His Word, the Holy Bible.<sup>71</sup>

The figure of Jesus Christ, as portrayed in the gospels and the rest of the New Testament is unique. Who else in history acted as Jesus did? This was God



made flesh, born of a virgin; who fulfilled a miraculous ministry of healing and raising people from the dead, who, after being unfairly tried and crucified, came alive from the dead, leaving his tomb and grave clothes empty; who promised to return as future judge of the world and arbiter of everyone's destiny. No other religious leader has ever been remotely like this!<sup>72</sup>

We Christians are so blessed. Our faith is powerful, able to overcome all ignorance and darkness in the world, because it is given directly from God through His Son Jesus.<sup>73</sup>

What I observed at the Parliament of the World's Religions that met in 1993 in Chicago was the alarming call for the unity of all the religions. The gods are on a roll, preparing the stage for the final entry of Antichrist through the New Age teachings. These include self-transformation, the deity of mankind, a commitment to globalism and an intolerance shown towards the "dissent" of religious exclusivism (New Age literature speaks of a purging of the planet. Christians are spoken of as the cancerous tissue that must be cut out for the healing of the planet).<sup>74</sup> The End Times are so, so near! I know this because geologists confirm what Scripture prophesies: they tell us that there is fault line on the Mount of Olives that extends all the way to the Dead Sea. When Christ returns with His multitude of followers (we will be there, glory hallelujah!) the Mount will be divided from east to west (see Zechariah 14:3-4). The opposing and warring armies will then unite against Christ with a fury fuelled by other so-called gods and inspired by Satan himself (in the unholy trinity of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet). But then, all the millions that took on the mark of the beast (this is in all probability a computer chip implanted into the forehead or forearm to regulate buying and selling) as well

as all those who worshipped and followed the other gods throughout the centuries will follow the unholy trinity into the eternal lake of fire. Every act of rebellion against God will be eternally and justly punished.<sup>75</sup>

So much for the way a mythic rationalist might describe his or her own views. How might faith at the mythic-rational level be described objectively? Utilizing elements from James Fowler's (1995:135-150) mythic literal of faith as well as his synthetic-conventional faith (151-173), we might say that here, the person has taken upon him or herself the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize and encourage belonging to his or her faith community. Intellectual assent has been given to possibility of the meanings of the faith's symbols being multivalent, but in practice these symbols are taken to be literally true. It is the Christian story that gives linear and coherent structure to the faith, and which is used to ensure unity. It is thus the basis on which to structure the theological approach towards other faiths. Holding on to and defending the integrity of the truth of the narrative is vital. There is the beginning of the phase that allows the person to step back from the narrative in order to formulate reflective and conceptual meanings on the faith. However at this stage, the increasing access to rationality is used not so much for self-reflection as to bolster and defend the value, integrity and truth of the narrative.

One of the greatest limiting factors of the mythic-rational stage is its fear of having the meaning of its narrative destroyed leaving the person without faith at all. This fear may sometimes be expressed in a paranoid fear of being targeted by, for example, the New Age *Illuminati*, who have control of the world's financial, communication and food resources, and who want to destroy the true believers (this might be shown also to be true of extremist Muslims, whose enemy is not New Age but the "Great Satan"

America.). Another limiting factor is that the person does not feel completely free to express doubts about the faith because the expectations and evaluations of others are generally strongly internalised. Expressing doubts, or acting in an autonomous way may give rise to “nihilistic despair” since it is seen as an interpersonal betrayal (Fowler 1995:173.)

Of course, by confronting this fear and taking seriously the implicit contradictions in different religious narratives is the very catalyst that leads to reflecting on meanings, one’s own and that of other faiths. James Barr (1984:174) makes an important observation in his book *Escaping from fundamentalism*:

Generally speaking, people do not become fundamentalists if they are already well informed about scripture and theology... [If they] become better informed [about scripture and doctrine] they may of course perfectly well remain within fundamentalism; but many begin a slow movement away from it. If this movement away is not to be a lazy slipping into scepticism and mere distrust, but a purposive and creative movement into stronger conviction and deeper grounding in faith, then knowledge of scripture, of theology and of the history of doctrine forms the essential pathway.

Barr captures the dilemma facing the mythic rationalist: do I accept that what I have taken to be true all this time is relative to my religion and group? Do I accept the evidence before me that other people of faith also find meaning and value in their traditions? Or do I use my new found ability to think crucially to keep at arms length this evidence that threatens to destroy all that I now hold sacred?

For those who resolutely make the decision to grow in their faith, even at the cost of the security they now enjoy, a sudden increase in their *ability* to dialogue is discovered as they begin to loosen their grip on the myths that have informed their

faith and spirituality. The opportunity is afforded them to begin to work out of a more inclusive and embracing level of faith, the subject of our next section.

# Chapter 4

## Rational level Christian dialogical responsibility

### 4.1 Context

We continue on our All Quadrant, All Level analysis of the Christian responsibility with regard to interfaith dialogue, beginning this chapter with an investigation of the Lower Left Quadrant, or an analysis of the cultural dynamics that gave rise to the rational theologies of interfaith dialogue. In terms of our four-fold definition of *responsibility*, we are dealing, then, with the rational level's intersubjective realm (LL) that now offers greater possibilities for new and deeper interpretations of the other faiths, which in turn offers a whole new range of possible responses (theologies, or UR) to those faiths. The rational level for Western Christianity arose in a cultural situation we will define as "modernism."

#### 4.1.1 Christian responsibility (LL) for interfaith dialogue and Modernism

The term "modernism" is about as difficult to define as is, we have seen, the term "rationalism." Modernism is often seen as a blanket term for an explosion of styles and trends in arts, culture and thinking that had as its central image a Void needing somehow to be filled but not knowing how. "Things fall apart," said Yeats; "The

centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." What was falling apart, of course was the Age of Enlightenment's main values of Reason, Logic and Progress. Modernity arrived at a place of not insubstantial despair after a period of intense hope fostered by the dreams of scientific and rational progress that accompanied the "good news" of the Enlightenment. "No more myths!" is the way that Wilber (1995:370ff) summarises the modern era's "good news". Rationality had the ability to demand demonstrable evidence, and this characteristic quickly deconstructed the worldspace of the mythological structures that depended largely upon an uncritical and unquestioning faith. The mythic rational dominator hierarchies of God, Pope and King were toppled in Europe and the New World through a series of bloody revolutions that echoed with Voltaire's cries of "Liberty or death!" and "Remember the cruelties!" and "No more myths!" With Emmanuel Kant, the three realms of "I", "We", and "It" were finally differentiated so that each could be judged separately to determine whether it was telling its own kind of truth. For "It", this meant scientific empirical fact could investigate the Right Hand side, or exterior of holons without interference from church or state. In the realm of "I" the criterion is sincerity, and "We" it is justness, care and concern. Never again does "I" have to automatically go along with society's norms and dictates.

However, not all was sweetness and light. The expected result from the shifting away from superstition, misery and all forms of irrational behaviour was supposed to be an all-encompassing state of freedom and happiness. However, this state was nowhere to be found. In fact, the dark side of progress was soon to make itself felt. Consider that a Nazi death camp could only ever exist if rationally administered. It was a logically justified argument that saw the production of nuclear weapons. Ecological meltdowns occur in the name of the pursuit of individual wealth and happiness. The "bad news"

of modernity was that not only were the three realms differentiated from mythology's indissociation, they were at risk of going too far into dissociation. "No more myths!" was exactly what was needed, but this all too soon came to mean, "God is dead." The throwing out of a prerational, anthropomorphic, mythic God went along with tossing out any hope of finding the transrational, non-anthropomorphic and superconscious Godhead (Wilber 1995:395).

How had this situation obtained? The church, almost without exception, had only emphasised the Ascent to God as defined by their institutional power hierarchies, whilst officially prohibiting any sign of genuine ascent. This was evident in their relentless persecution of the mystics. It was, says Wilber (1995:401) not Copernicus, but the mystic Giordano Bruno, who, with his notion of a plurality of worlds which saw a decentred earth in an infinitely populous universe, jolted Europe out of its geocentric, egocentric and anthropocentric worldview, and earned him the stake-wielding attention of the Inquisition. Modernity reacted to the obscurantism and self-serving power-mongering of the church by rejecting the Ascent it preached and focussing on the descending arm of the Great Chain of Being. Its focus was "Plenitude", concentrating on the infinite creativity of an Infinite Source that was systematically interlinked in a chain or web of relations.

Many modern thinkers were no longer able to believe in the existence of God or Christian morality given the church's embeddedness in a mythological worldview. However, neither could they believe in salvation through progress. There seemed no longer to be a centre to Western culture. Yet, unlike Buddhist cultures, the West was acutely uncomfortable with nothing at the centre. Hence modernity was to become a seemingly endless search for a new centre to fill the post-Nietzschean Void. Modern art became increasingly self-absorbed as artists attempted to find ways to represent

eternity from the midst of chaos. Cubists such as Picasso painted not what could be seen, but what they “knew” was there. Impressionists such as Manet and Monet decomposed the supposed solidity of objects into fragments of speckled light. Authors such as Hemingway gave tacit recognition to this lack of centre by reworking the Lord’s Prayer, placing “nada” at significant places; “Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name; Thy kingdom nada...(in Powell 1998:12). James Joyce experimented with a fluid and shifting style of prose that followed his stream-of-consciousness in both *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake*. Wide audiences could not always appreciate the rejection of traditional character development for a more private, subjective experience. It was, nevertheless, a concerted attempt to find an inner truth behind mere appearances and a simultaneous rejection of a growing technocratic bureaucracy whose machine-like efficiency robbed people of choice, of beauty of novelty. These unrelenting critics of modernity desired to break out of “ordered efficiency” to find the freedom of the mix of identities, realities, cultures, races and gender roles, the Plenitude of the Universe.

Christian dialogians, those who took seriously their *responsibility* to speak of the church’s relations with other faiths meaningfully into this situation of cultural dissociation, were not long silent in the face of the crisis of the times. Ernst Troeltsch (in Knitter 1985:23 ff.) was one of the first Christian theologians to face seriously the clash between the crisis of modernity and the Gospel. He wrestled with the implications of fact that all human cultures were limited and changing, that is, relative. This had implications for the claims that the Gospel was unchanging and relevant for all peoples at all times. Facing this dilemma was a daunting yet critical task for many theologians subsequent to Troeltsch. Before looking at the theologies



that arose out of this cultural context, let us explore what the dissociation of modernity implied for the Christian approach to dialogue.

#### 4.1.2. The dissociation of modernism

The dialectics of progress is understood as the process whereby the evolution into higher realms of integration brings with it new capacities as well as new problems. This means that in the course of history, the dialectical pendulum swings, as it will on occasion, too far into dissociation, which, on the rational level, meant a wild careening towards systems thinking. We recall some of Wilber's evolutionary principles. With his distinction between differentiation and dissociation, Wilber reminds us that instead of simply differentiating from, and including lower structures of consciousness, higher structures can dissociate and repress those lower levels. Also, there is the important distinction between healthy and pathological hierarchy: hierarchy in itself is not problematic, but it can become so when natural holarchical processes become distorted and degenerative. Finally, when higher structures are overtaken by lower ones, or when pathological hierarchies are dominated by less integrative structures, social pathologies can and usually will result.<sup>76</sup>

Wilber's observations on the dialectics of progress means that the more evolution proceeds holarchically, the more things arise that can go wrong with the process. Hence, social ills may be a positive sign of evolution rather than a denial of it. Using these tenets it is possible to differentiate simple progress theories from more sophisticated evolutionary theories of human development.

The problem was to become acute. The systems theories that resulted out of this research into Plenitude were now strongly lopsided. "No more Ascent" meant that the

Descended, or manifest arm of the Great Chain came to be the only allowable domain. In the multidimensional Kosmos, the One gives birth to the Many, and to the All, and the All then returns to the One, with each individual aspect simultaneously being the perfect incarnation of the infinite One (the One permeates and fulfils every single thing and the All). Now however, the One was to be disallowed because it could not be scientifically proven. This meant that each individual of the Many was to find its functional fit within the great web of the All.

The sheer power of [rationality's] capacity to represent the Kosmos empirically – a power unleashed by the differentiation of the Big Three – would allow it inadvertently to collapse the Kosmos merely to its monological, empirical, Right Hand aspects, a collapse of men and women into a purely Descended world, flatland to the core (Wilber 1995:407/8).

The word “flatland” perfectly captures Wilber’s analysis of where the wheels began to wobble uncontrollably for modernity. We saw that the “Good News” of modernity was its recognition of the power and freedom from restrictive mythologies brought about by the rational level, and for interfaith dialogue, this was clearly deeply positive. Scientists in all fields were no longer bound by the early scientific paradigm that collapsed the Kosmos exclusively into the Upper Right Quadrant i.e. into material, atomistic language. For theologies of dialogue, this meant no longer having to strain one’s theories about other faiths through the sieve of the superiority of the Christian myth and objectivist Christian theologies (that is why these theologies are quite aptly names “mythic rational”). Wilber (1997:20-21) calls these various approaches “gross reductionism”. They are variously known as scientific materialism, positivism, behaviourism, empiricism – all the objectivistic-exterior approaches that leave no room for “I” and “we”. This thinking had the tendency to translate into

theologies that sought to keep the religions separate and with Christianity as the obviously superior.

However, the truly “Bad News” of late modernity was a “subtle reductionism,” that widely condemned gross reductionism and attempted to replace it with systems thinking. While systems thinking was preferable to atomistic thinking, it nevertheless still sought to explain the Left Hand Quadrants in terms of their Right Hand correlates. God’s plenitude was reduced into flatland, or monological systems theory, in order to describe reality in “It” language. A vast, interlocking order of things, yes, but still no value and interpretation (LL), no Truth and Beauty (UL).

An important result of this subtle reductionism was the confusion it brought about for many systems thinkers, for they undercut their very ability to discern between right and wrong. They were lost in a world where nothing was supposed to be better than anything else was – except, quite ironically, the views of the propagators of the “all things are equal” theories.

Recall that precisely because of mythological Christianity’s insistence of that only Jesus was fully the Son of God to the exclusion of those who wanted or could progress towards the causal and nondual levels, the West has been left with a deep spiritual yearning. With the emergence of reason from myth as the central social organizing principle, the opportunity was afforded to find God in some other place than in mythological heaven. The age of Reason then, threw itself into discovering the glories of creation towards the visible, sensible God. Thus, instead of an infinite above, the West pitched its attention to the infinite ahead with an emphasis not on depth but on infinite span. (Wilber 1995:410).

The upper reaches of human development that were earlier mythologized into angels and archangels were now rationalized into higher levels of intelligence and wisdom.

Anything that sought to transcend rationality was viewed with tremendous suspicion. All that was allowed was the realm of the sense guided by Reason. What was left of the Kosmos was a purely empirical world in an interlocking order; or “flatland systems theory” (Wilber 1995:415).

With a purely instrumental and interlocking theory that recognized only surfaces and no depth, the only place to find the “why” or motivation of life was in the empirical and sensory, thus in hedonism. The pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, which had been left behind very early on in the evolutionary process (i.e. archaic level), came once again to the fore simply because quality could be adequately recognized or calculated by the “all are equal” theories, leaving only quantity.

Whenever the Kosmos was reduced to the Right Hand only, or “It” language, then all meaning, value, awareness and even consciousness was denied, and all attempts to describe the subjective, Left Hand Quadrants, ended in objectivist language. Thus, any attempt to find a transforming dialogue between subjects was thwarted, for it found in its search for meaning only objects, never a Thou. “A gaze,” says Habermas (in Wilber 1005:441)

that objectifies and examines, takes things apart analytically, that monitors and penetrates everything, gains a power that is structurally formative for (their) institutions. It is a gaze of the rational subject who has lost all merely intuitive bonds with his environment and torn down all the bridges built up of intersubjective [and dialogical] agreement, and for whom in his monological isolation, other subjects are only accessible as the objects of nonparticipant observation.

Thus, while reason has undermined and brought to the light the suppression and exploitation of the mythological worldview, it has put into its place the domination of its instrumentalizing objectivity. Clearly, the Christian understanding of itself with regard to other faiths was profoundly affected, especially by some of the extreme

responses of the new flatland thinking. One of those extremes was to reduce everything to the Lower Left Quadrant in response to a generation of Right Hand reductionism.

### 4.1.3 Extreme Culturalism

In an attempt to rectify the reductionist and repressive aspects of the Enlightenment, Wilber (1995:460 ff) traces the rise of an “eco-Romantic” rebellion against the “Ego-Enlightenment.” The latter used the worldspace of multiple perspectives to objectify diversity in order to find common themes and essences. This resulted in them effectively ignoring the great diversity of peoples and perspectives, cultures and creeds. The former were driven by the celebration of diversity in a direct attempt to cultivate an understanding and sympathetic valuation of different points of view. The motivation of this move was the desire to enrich their own inner life, and to give validity to the different cultures with which they were engaged. But the Romantics had as little understanding of the deeper reaches of the self as the rationalists. Instead of the One, they pursued only the Many with still no appreciation for the One that transcends the Many. ‘Where the Ego-Enlightenment counselled each and all to be uniformly universal, the Eco-Romantics’ deepest desire was to be absolutely and even radically different, that is, utterly and radically unique (leading to) an absolute anarchy of the particular, a riot of individual differences<sup>77</sup>’ (Wilber 1995:463-464). At the risk of putting last things first, let us ask the important question of how we might relate this retro-Romantic, irenic approach to Christian interfaith dialogue. In other words, what are the benefits of the rational culture for dialogue, and, how do the potential pathologies of the rational level affect interfaith dialogue?

#### 4.1.4 Rational level cultural pathology

The benefits for a theology of dialogue at the rational level are immense. A rational theology soon finds itself dissatisfied with the gestalt created by the “interventionist God” who swoops down into human affairs by somewhat arbitrarily choosing one people, one nation or one religion above all others through which to make Himself known to the world. God is democratised, as it were. Divinity comes to be seen not only as a Transcendent Being who created the “Clockwork Orange” world that runs more or less on its own, requiring the occasional immanential and mighty swooping in from above to punish and convert the infidels who disobey the Mighty Decrees of Eternal Law. Rather God is deemed to be immanentially present in the very unfolding of finite history itself. The Absolute becomes a paradoxical presence both within and beyond this world that becomes known through the shared human awareness of self-experience and restlessness, in constant search for that “more” that would fulfil her or his deepest longing.

This was, in essence, a new awareness of humanity as not only a rational and social being, but also as an unavoidably historical being. Everything, including religious faith, belief and knowledge was understood to be historically conditioned. This overriding realization of the both changing and limited nature of reality militated strongly against any attempt to make one religion the one and only, placing one system of faith above all others. All religions, including Christianity, could now at best be viewed as a vehicle for the unfolding revelation of God, but could certainly not be in itself the ultimate expression of the Ultimate.

Thus, for interreligious dialogue to take place in an environment of mutual respect, Christians had to come to a stark realization: anticipating theologians such as Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, the “father of historical consciousness,” Ernst Troeltsch (in Knitter 1992:27) says,

Nowhere is Christianity the absolute religion, an utterly unique species free of the historical conditions that comprise its environment at any given time. Nowhere is it the changeless, exhaustive, and unconditioned realization of that which is conceived as the ultimate principle of religion. The Christian religion is in every moment of its history a purely historical phenomenon, subject to all the limitations to which any individual historical phenomenon is exposed, just like the other great religions.

If no religion could claim to be ultimate, then surely there needed within every faith to be something of God’s revelation? Would it not be possible, asked the rational level dialogians, to find the essential message of truth within each faith? In addition, if the truth of God is within each religion, surely these truths might be seen to constitute a common essence that could be extracted from the nonessentials of the faith and then agreed upon and accepted by all in dialogue?

Both the advantages and the potential pathologies of dialogue at the rational level had by now begun to reveal themselves. Many of the rational level dialogians began to fall into the Retro-Romantic trap, either ignoring or not being able to give answers to the problems posed by radical relativity. The theologies of “common essence” by Toynbee, William Cantwell Smith, and Frithjof Schuon (in Knitter 1985:37-54) seemed unwilling to deal with the fact that the universal always expresses itself in the particular, and to ignore either is to distort both.

This Romantic position did not, it would seem, take historical relativity seriously enough. Since every person is thoroughly conditioned by their own social context, to speak of “essence” is also to propagate one’s concepts, mythic structures, cultural

prejudices and social need for power and recognition. We can be grateful to authors such as Steven Katz (1978, 1983) who have reminded us that the external form that our religions take profoundly affects the way we experience the Divine. A Christian experiences Jesus as the Christ, whereas a Mahayana Buddhist experiences *Sunyata* as a radical Emptiness that embraces the fullness of all the interconnected complexities of Form. One cannot with integrity speak of these experiences as being similar “in essence”.

Secondly, when an unbalanced stress is laid on the essential unity and that which is common between the religions, a genuine dialogue, which is unafraid of conflicting viewpoints and strongly held convictions, becomes all the more remote for the sake of unity. Will not the need to conform create situations in which polemical positions are perhaps repressed for the sake of unity?

Thirdly, is it necessary for one to deny that which one considers being absolute for dialogue to occur? Is it taboo to accept that whilst the Absolute might never be captured in words or concepts, the Absolute can be experienced in its fullness right here and now within one’s own religious framework? Put another way: is the only absolute in dialogue the assertion that you may not actually have an absolute? Any assertion that asserts a priori that all absolutes are null and void ought to be viewed with at least some suspicion. It may well be that the claim of Christians, i.e. that “Jesus of Nazareth offers a symbol and a message that will prove to be the central focus of all religious experience and expression” is a real possibility to be explored, and not rejected out of hand (see Knitter 1985:54).

The danger in dialogue at this rational level that ought to be recognized and avoided is the potentially solipsistic position where those engaged in dialogue simply identify



with the dialogical experience within a purely relativistic frame of reference, and deny the religious perspective that brought them into dialogue in the first place.

One of the most exciting, new developmental achievements of this level is the experience of the self as *observer* rather than the self as merely known (Broughton in Wilber 1995:262). This is the very beginning of the emergence of the transcendental Witness, or Atman, which differentiates itself from the empirical ego whilst including it into this higher embrace. If it is not pathologically subverted, this emerging self, which has disidentified itself from body, persona, ego and mind, is called upon to integrate all of these into a higher union, unifying them all. However, with no transcendent frame of reference, there exists the danger of the self being in submission to whatever presents itself in dialogue, not unlike Baudrillard (1988) submitting to the ever changing, hyperreal images on a flashing television screen tuned to a dead screen. This, potentially, places prerational, mythological religious systems, such as the worship of the Nazi Aryan Race, on the same level as Teresa of Avila's highest stage in contemplative prayer; the nightmare of the Wilberian pre/trans writ large in dialogue.

These then, are some of the rational level cultural (LL) dynamics of modernity, viewed from within Wilber's AQAL perspective, in which various rational level theologies of dialogue have arisen. We can but touch upon some of the plethora of theologies, and we shall do so from within our defined hermeneutics.

## 4.2 Rational theology of interfaith dialogue (UR)

We have made the point that the meaning of the word “rationality” is difficult to pin down. It can be understood in terms of a person having formal operational cognition, or the capacity to think about one’s thinking. In reflecting on one’s own thought processes, one is able to transcend them by taking different perspectives. Now one is in a position to justify one’s own thoughts and actions based not only on what society says is right (conformist/sociocentric) but also on reasons and evidence that may even contradict traditional thought. The rational realm opens up amazing possibilities for theology in general, and a theology of dialogue in particular, previously denied to conventional theological thought.

The confessional theologies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which we heavily influenced by scientific or atomistic thinking, came to be challenged by the rise of the modern thought of the Enlightenment. German Idealism and Romanticism, among other philosophies, encouraged the rise of an epochal shift for theology that, in the face of this new thinking, could simply not continue in its old patterns, for the modern sciences showed humanity its place in the evolution of the universe, showing the Creator to be the architect of evolution “Himself.”

A theology of modernity was recognizable by two basic presuppositions, according to Hans Küng (1988:161ff). The first was its newly devised *heuristic criteria*. These required of theology that it be neither “opportunistic” nor “conformist”. It needed to guard against the temptation of shoving its version of truth into the gaps that beset both the paradigmatic changes in thinking that were occurring and the initially overwhelming new data being unearthed by modernity’s newly discovered research tools. It needed, rather, to seek the Truth. Theology’s inquiry needed, in other words, to be free from the hindrance of administrative or hierarchical sanction (mythic rational). It also needed to be critical, knowing its obligations to its methodological

premises. This translated into theology understanding itself to be ecumenical, in the sense of being above narrow denominational biases. It was a theology that saw other Christian theologies not as enemies to be resisted, but as partners in a dialogue geared towards mutual understanding.

The second presupposition was the realization the *historical nature* of theological endeavour. Modern science had shown all of nature, including humanity, as evolving and not static. Modern philosophers, from Descartes and Kant to Heidegger and Whitehead provided a new understanding of the nature of development, historicity and the worldliness (incarnation) of God. Modern democracies had given new insight into individual freedoms and the need for social justice. Modern critiques of religion had exposed the possible misuse of religion. Feuerbach had recognized religion's potential for anti-human alienation, Marx its support for unjust social structures, and Nietzsche its moral degradation of humanity.

Modern humanities had given new insight in the structures of the consciousness. Modern exegesis, since Reimarus, Lessing and Strauss, had given theology a new and critical understanding of the history of Jesus, the church and of dogma. Modern liberation movements had enabled theology to grapple with questions of sexism, racism, imperialism and unjust social systems, such as *Apartheid*. Most important for our purposes, the ever-growing recognition of the possibility of grace and truth in other faiths, the validity of their symbols and religious practice had begun to drive Christian theology towards a new quest.

The goal of rational level theologies, then, was to interpret Christian symbols, rituals and dogmas in ways that did not exclude the other, yet, simultaneously, endeavoured to remain true to its own deepest understanding of Truth. This led to various attempts

at restating a Christian theology of religions, including most inclusivist and some pluralist (for example “common essence”) theologies of interfaith dialogue.

It is not my intention to give an in-depth description of these theologies, but merely to show how they act as the typical *response* of Christians towards dialogical issues at this level of development.

#### 4.2.1 Theological response of inclusion (UR)

It has been, for the most part, the mainline Protestant and contemporary Catholic theologians who have endeavoured to vigorously grapple with the question of God’s revelation outside of the Christian Scriptures. These theologians contend that Barth’s theology of the Word that so deftly drops into human affairs “perpendicularly from above” leaves no hook for the historically aware person to understand God’s revelation in her or his own historical context. Barth, they say, leaves the revelation of God in a “theological ghetto”<sup>78</sup>. They argue that there is a sense of God instilled in human nature that allows some knowledge of God and of oneself apart from a specifically Christian revelation. This is not to say that this knowledge is perfect. It remains obscure and incomplete, yet without it being present, God’s revelation would remain meaningless. Paul Tillich’s well-known contention that every person seeks and can be grasped by their “ultimate concern” is based on the fundamental premise of this pre-existent knowledge, pre-Christian revelation God. Wolfhart Pannenberg’s (in Knitter 1992:98ff) argument for a general revelation is rooted in the historical nature of human experience. The human “openness” and “quest for more” interacts with the open-ended processes of history to provide an ongoing revelation of God, which will only be complete at the end of history. He feels that the history of religions is

precisely the history of the appearing of the divine mystery. This search for the fullness of revelation provides the necessary elements of competition, but also basic unity of the history of religions.

Pannenberg's use of these categories, especially that of "competition" reveals the rational character of his theology well given the cultural (LL) shift from military conquest to wealth creation as the level's basic need – or from war to competition. Yet, this level, in recognizing the strength of the other, must see itself as ultimately superior. Therefore, while a general, if somewhat dark and imperfect, revelation of God is allowed to the other faiths, salvation is categorically denied them unless a way can be made to view them as somehow Christian.

Karl Rahner's concept of the "Anonymous Christianity" is just such an attempt. His basic premise was an optimistic trust that God truly wants to save all humankind. This was, for Rahner a reasonable assumption. As such, God offers that grace, without which salvation would be impossible, to all people irrespective of their faith convictions. From this optimistic reasoning, Rahner formulates his teaching on the "supernatural existential," in which grace infuses and becomes part of human nature.

In all acts of knowing and loving finite objects, we are reaching out to the infinite that gives all objects their attraction and meaning. When humans experience themselves to be fully human, they become infinitely open to infinite mystery. Therefore, every time a human being reaches out beyond her or himself to what is true, good and beautiful, she or he is experiencing and responding to God's grace. To know God in the different ways of being authentically human, such as taking responsibility for others, facing death or meaninglessness, experiencing the deep beauty or wrenching demands of commitment to another human being or a deep commitment to a humanitarian cause, is, for Rahner, not just revelation. It includes human salvation, which is

communion with the one true God, and an “experience of purpose, peace, and growth for the individual and society” (Knitter 1985:126).

However, Christianity remains for Rahner the Omega point or fulfilment for the other faiths. It is always “they” who are “anonymous Christians”, never “us” who are “anonymous Jews” or “anonymous Muslims”.

#### 4.2.2 Limitations of Rational level Theologies of Religions

As much as these theologies show a remarkable advance on those that obtain in the mythic rational level, the shortfalls of these approaches become obvious with a closer reading. They begin by affirming the riches and not the poverty of other religions.

This is good. Nevertheless, if all religions contain truth, why should Christianity in particular be *the* truth? Why cling to the notion that God reveals Godself to those of other faiths, but does not save them? On the one hand, then, the dialectical theologies of Barth, Bonhoeffer and Kraemer, whose lack of any meaningful analysis<sup>79</sup> of other faiths saw the other religions as merely “natural theology”. As such, they were little more than a sinful revolt against God.

Rational level theologies, then, may have avoided a theological, historical and cultural ghetto, but seem to have ended up in *dialogical* ghetto! Rahner’s theology that swept all human beings of good will across “the paper-thin bridge of a theological fabrication into the back door of the Holy Roman Church?” (Küng 1976:98), is, therefore, increasingly under question. Is his attempt to break Christianity out of its dialogical isolationism not a mere re-stating of the doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*? Why should it be true that the “supernatural elements” in other faiths remain incomplete until they come to know and embrace Christ? Rahner insists that God

desires the salvation of everyone, and Christ through his Incarnation, death and resurrection, wins this salvation. But has Rahner not imposed upon the religions the specifically Christian concepts of sin, grace, revelation and salvation, which, outside of Christianity, make little sense given that they too have their own mythic, symbolic and rational structures of faith (in Knitter 1985:129)?

One of the most important prerequisites for inter-religious dialogue on the rational level is that the participating dialogians be allowed to speak out of clear personal convictions, and feel both free and bold enough to take contrary positions. In other words, they *do* need to be able to make claims of universal relevance if they so wish. They must be allowed to feel that their truth claims are true not just for themselves, but also for all peoples at all times. Veteran dialogian John Cobb (1982:45) says that the very best dialogue occurs when the partners are deeply convinced of many things. "Truth is best approached not by the absence of convictions but by submitting strong convictions to the light of criticism." This criticism is, as we have seen, not very welcome to those whose faith is dependent on the sort of dogmatic attitude that rejects in advance the possibility that it might be wrong. Real conviction, on the other hand, do not rest on the need to resort to authoritarian claims of truth, but submit themselves to any test of authenticity asked of it.

However, as Knitter (1985:142) argues, there is a difference between a religious truth that is presented as universally true and one that is presented as definitively and normatively relevant. Paul Knitter, along with many other Christian dialogians such as John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, exposes the deep-seated tendency within Christian theology to absolutize itself, especially in matters that it considers to be of central importance. The major absolutist principle they identify is the Christological claim of the uniqueness and finality of Christ for salvation. Harvey Cox (in Knitter

1996:xiii) asks a question that exposes the rational level's competitive desire to be the best:

How much has traditional theology especially its Christological base, served to cloak or condone an unconscious theological desire to maintain superiority, or to dominate and control, or to devalue other traditions culturally or religiously (in order to) justify the subordination and exploitation of other cultures and religions?

The absolutizing of one religion so that it becomes the norm for all others is not unlike the sexist absolutizing of gender, in which one gender is established as the norm of human existence (Suchocki 1987:150). Under patriarchal systems, women's experiences are generally subsumed under masculinity, since the masculine experience has been universalised into being the norm for all that is human. Similarly, if Christianity, or any other faith, is elevated to being the norm by which all others are judged, there will be a distortion of the experiences perceived as true by adherents of the subsumed religion. There is a simultaneous distortion of the elevated religion, in that its uniqueness and particularity is lost in the process its being made universally true.

Just as women are judged by the male experience, then, so other faiths are judged by the Christian experience, setting up the competitive patterns of superiority versus inferiority. Qualities that are reprehensible in men/Christianity are projected onto women/other faiths as appropriate descriptions not applicable to themselves. Suchocki (1987:152-153) takes Hans Küng to task for his having fallen into this trap of non-self awareness and its resultant projections.

(The) 'fearsome, grimacing gods of Bali' may be no less fearsome than some bloody depictions of a crucified Christ. Küng not only names [the] negative features in other religions without noting their parallels in Christianity but, on the contrary, he compares them with elements he considers noble within Christianity. Thus the 'grimacing gods' are contrasted with a 'wall of icons...'



and temple prostitution is contrasted with 'Christian consecration of virgins'. The lingam is contrasted with the cross, and the holy wars are contrasted with the love of enemies preached by Christianity.

The devaluing of other faiths so typical on the rational level tends to result in the inflation of Christianity's contribution to other faiths, making it much more important than vice versa. Where then, is the full mutuality so necessary for authentic dialogue? Are we left with a situation in which an unadulterated relativism is the only alternative? Do we have no access to a transcendence of isolated particularities that provides avenues through which to travel up towards an outlook post with which to determine a valid stance towards self and others?

Suchocki (1987:154-160) argues that the liberation theological and feminist category of *justice* can act as precisely that transcendent perspective that interfaith dialogue so desperately needs at this level. However, given an integral, all-quadrant, all-level approach, such a Suchockian suggestion is immediately seen as very useful, but also partial and inadequate. Justice/meaning/Lower Left is important, but cannot be elevated above the other realms and isolated at the expense of the other Quadrants, that is the realms of theology/truth (UR), spirituality (UL) and social structure (LR). We see Suchoki struggling to stretch the Lower Left Quadrant far enough to incorporate the others, but coming up against insuperable difficulties. "Oddly enough," she admits, "[using as our transcendent perspective] the [nonimperialistic criterion of justice] puts us back in the ideological realm we supposedly left behind in calling for justice [LL] rather than doctrine [UR] as the basis of dialogue" (Suchoki 1987:159). It is not odd at all, but an inevitable result of trying to elevate one realm above another. The only way Suchoki can justify this elevation of justice is the hope that it is able to act as "a dynamic transformative notion, capable of being used even to judge itself" (Suchoki 1987:159).

Suchoki's model is not particularly convincing, then. Instead of hoping that justice alone has the ability to bring about this transformation, it would be far more feasible to place justice (LL) within a larger framework that includes doctrine (UR), spirituality (UL) and social structures (LR). These together can be transformed into a higher, more inclusive level of development, which together acts as the "dynamic and transformative notion" that is able to judge the lower, less integrative realm from which it is derived.

It needs to be said that even the most sublime rational (and centauric, for that matter) level theological arguments show up the fissures that separate it from the ideal pointed to by Jesus' preaching on the Kingdom of God, especially in the light of the pervasive hunger, destitution and oppression in the world today. Tom Driver (in Hick and Knitter 1987:205) quotes Kenneth Surin:

The cries of those who hunger point to the lie in even the most profound theological teleologies... Why [do the discussions of dialogue and pluralism] generate a plethora of mutualities, commonalities, unities, conjunctions, consonances etc., when the material position of the faith-traditions in the hegemonic culture of late capitalistic society requires us to valorise something radically different – viz., disjunctions, disunities, (countervailing) distances, dissonances etc.?

As long as the theological issues being discussed with regard to interfaith dialogue being discussed do nothing to address the situation of the starving, they are little more than justifications of ideologies that propagate a "status quo that is hostile to the kingdom of God." Even pluralistic theologies of dialogue with their insistence that every religion has its own inherent integrity, are themselves a product of (post)modern, Western rational level thinking. Unfortunately, their "pretended globalism is no less particular than is the universality claimed for Christ in traditional dogmatics...[given the] dilemmas of liberal Christianity at the present time...[i.e.] the

liberal tendency to view the whole world as like unto itself, and its distance, even if it be a sympathetic distance, from the wretched of the earth.” Nevertheless, it is only these deeper, more inclusive theologies that arise in the next level of response of Christians towards other faiths that have the opportunity and/or ability (as we shall see in our next chapter) to address the problems with which the rational level theologies struggle.

That, however, is ahead of the story. Right now, we need to address the issue of the sociological shift from the mythic rational to the rational level in the Lower Right Quadrant.

#### 4.3 The shift from the mythic rational to the rational level in the sociological Quadrant (LR)

We have investigated Christianity’s *response* (UR) to the rise of rationality as the central organizing principle of its society and institutions (churches) how these responses are related to Christianity’s newly perceived *responsibility* (LL) for a relevant hermeneutical approach towards the issue of interfaith dialogue. How did Christianity deal with the challenges of modernity in its structures, and how did these differ from the structures created on the mythic rational level?

Having spent almost two millennia drinking deeply at the table of mythic rationalism the intoxicating belief of Christian superiority, many churches on the newly acquired rational level still experienced a hangover, if you will, that blearily insisted other faiths were merely roadside pubs along the way to full inclusion in the feasting hall of

the Kingdom. The inclusivist position insisted that the full revelation of God was really possible within the structures and teachings of other faiths, but only in the sense of Luther's *posteriora Dei*, the hind parts of God. This position was based, in part, on scriptures such as Romans 1:18-32, where Paul affirms a revelation of God outside of the teachings of the Gospel, but which serves only as a *praeparatio evangelica*.<sup>80</sup> Full salvation was reserved for those who fully endorsed and accepted the Church's doctrine of the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ. The church's mission was quite simply to bring those outside of the church or church doctrine out from the cold into the warmth and light of its sure and unshakable foundational truths.

Structurally, the church had had to cope with the shift from the mythic level to the mythic rational. This meant a breaking of a purely hierarchical, top-down structure of power - from Pope to Priest to Pleb, as it were. Hans Küng (1995:390ff.) captures well the characteristics of what he calls the "Romanization" of the church's structures, which bestowed upon it many of the typically mythic level organizational and structural characteristics.

The first characteristic was *centralization*. Pope Gregory VII fanatically worked towards the complete orientation of the church towards the faith, law, liturgy, organization and discipline of Rome. Instead of a collegiality between bishops, there was merely papal authority. No longer "Peter's representative" but "God's representative," a title claimed by Innocent IV as a basis for a radical and wide ranging authority. This complete "fixation on an absolute monarch" was in no way in keeping with the New Testament church, and had a profound effect on the church's relationship with other faiths, in particular, Judaism. Anti-Judaism was directly encouraged by papal authoritarianism. Jews, who were regarded as the "slaves of sin," now became the slaves of the Christian rulers.

Second, there was *legalism*. The church developed its own laws, and science of church law, every bit as complex as state law today, and required professionals to interpret that law. The Pope was firmly ensconced as the supreme governor, absolute lawgiver, and supreme judge in and of the church.

Third, *politicization*. It was Gregory VII again, who believed that if God had given him complete authority in sublime spiritual matters, how much more did his power extend to mere worldly matters? He desired that all rulers “swear fealty, pay tribute and offer homage” to him. His and his successors’ rule were marked by political manoeuvrings strengthened by enforced spiritual sanctions, but finally weakened by deceit, social oppression, nepotism, corruption, and financial exploitation through often very sophisticated means. These occurrences point to the upper limits of the integrative potential of the mythic level of social organization. Today there are a plethora of churches that, in the face of the confusions presented by modernity, have regressed to this level of organization, now no longer with a Pope at its head, but an all-powerful “Pastor.” We have today not the “Romanization” of the church, but what we might call the “Charismaticization” of the church, with all the classic mythological characteristics in place. Küng (1995:397) issues a warning about the inevitable moral demise of such systems: instead of an abiding concern with the *Evangelium secundum Marcum* – continuing the Good News of Mark – there is the pursuit of the *Evangelium secundum Marcam* – the pursuit of the gospel of the Silver Mark.

Fourth, *militarization*. Yes, it was Gregory VII again who epitomised the classic Emperor of the mythic level, with his excessive preoccupation with a great military campaign to the East to conquer Jerusalem and enforce the obedience of Byzantium. Having forgotten Christ’s command to Peter to put up his sword, Gregory “constantly recruited troops, engaged in warlike enterprises and even rode into battle in person”

while fondly quoting Jeremiah: “Cursed is he who keeps back his sword from bloodshed!” (in Küng 1995:398). Crusades and wars are no accident. They are intimately connected with mythic church structures. This was certainly the case at the time, for Christians felt that Christ himself approved the Crusades. Added to this was the logically extenuated belief that opposing a war for Christ meant that one was a de facto religious and political outlaw. These beliefs justified a Crusade not just against Jews and Muslims, but also against other Christians, even in the West, such as the Albigensians, or Cathars, in the South of France. Structurally, there are clear similarities to today’s mythic-level Pentecostal and charismatic churches who may not use literal swords, but certainly use militaristic language to oppose the other faiths or even the Catholic Church.

Fifth, there was the *clericalization* of the church, with its insistence on compulsory celibacy for the priests, the increasingly wealthy monasteries and clergy, and the neglect of the duties of preaching and pastoral care (Küng 1995:405). The dominant social status that this caused removed the clergy from real contact from normal Christians, and to some extent, meant that the clergy were virtually identified with the church. A similar pattern of tension can be traced between monastic and lay existence in early Buddhism, which became quite evident in its Theravādin expressions. In its slow, diverse and many layered process of transformation from Theravāda to Mahāyāna forms, which was first unsystematic, then systematic and philosophical, Buddhist salvation/liberation opened up from being limited only to monks and nuns (the “Sons of Buddha”) to all who would seek enlightenment. Within mythic-rational forms of Christianity, salvation remains available, as we have seen, to only those within the circle of the saved.

One might be tempted to find a simplistic reason for the shift in Christianity from mythic rational to rational structures of church and society. For example, the undeniable new geopolitical era that was brought about by the discovery of the new continents in which different parts of the world came about through a progressive, if unequal Europeanization. An undiluted medieval form of Christianity, with its crusader mentality, was what motivated Christopher Columbus, who saw his task as both a prospecting and missionary voyage, to bring the world under the Lordship of God, Pope and King. In contrast to the early church's mission to the world, that allowed for an autonomous development into new paradigms and cultures (Hellenistic), the *Conquistadores* and missionaries that were to attain military and cultural victories in the new world, saw their task as one of eliminating the "primitive" religions and worldviews that governed the lives of the natives. Thus it was not the discoveries that brought about the changes, but rather the new secular understanding of politics and state, the new international laws and results of the experimental sciences that would characterise modernity.

It was the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) that ended with the Peace of Westphalia, which took the confessionalism of the mythic rational structures to new levels of absurdity. Positively, it resulted in the breakdown of the power of the mythic rational Protestant political offensive, and it lay to rest the attempts at rebuilding the purely mythic level imperial Catholic universal monarchy. A deep and persistent social crisis became apparent which saw stagnation in population, decline in agriculture and trade, ambiguity in moral values and the replacement of hope for the future with anxiety and uncertainty. For many political thinkers of the time (Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes) argued rationally for a royal absolutism as the only means of domestic and international peace. Cardinal Richelieu's policies of absolutist centralization, based on Jean

Bodin's state doctrine *Les six livres de la République* (1576) and further expounded upon by Cardinal Mazarin, led to the definitive absolutist European monarch, namely Louis XIV. In the place of emperor or Pope, the individual king made claim to supreme power or sovereignty by direct appeal to the authority of God in order to prevent any resistance to the State. This came about, says K  ng (1995:661) through a "de-theologizing and de-confessionalizing of public life", resulting in a "sharper politicization and bureaucratisation" of state life.

Yet, it was to be not absolutist rule but nationalism, as a collection of modern sovereign states with equal rights, which was to take over from religion as the centre and means of social stability. The revolutions in science (Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler and Darwin) and in philosophy (Voltaire, Rousseau, Bacon, Descartes, Kant) soon found expression in the revolutions in politics, state, society and church. The absolutist monarchs were initially keen to adopt the demands of the Enlightenment insofar as they insisted on detachment from ecclesiastical rule. However, the fundamental rational stance of the Enlightenment paradigm soon directed itself against the political power of the aristocracy. Intellectual and scientific revolutions became social and political revolutions. Economic and social crises tend to accompany all paradigm shifts, which included in this instance waves of inflation, revolts due to famine, poverty and state bankruptcy. However, a political paradigm shift that sought to free people from the *Ancien R  gime* with its hierarchical power structures soon followed. Instead of a monarchy, a National Assembly arose that could claim to be the sole representative of the will of the nation. Instead of a medieval theocracy (mythic level), or Protestant authority or council (mythic rational), instead of an early modern enlightened absolutism (late mythic rational),



now a democracy (rational) with its freely elected representatives in the National Assembly to ensure good governance.

#### 4.3.1 Church Structure in Rational level society (LR)

Sociologically, the modern church might be characterized by the individualization and the pluralization of Christianity. Instead of being faced with rigid religious institutions, individuals were now offered the possibility of making an independent choice in seeking their own path towards fulfilment, self-discovery and a personal relationship with the Divine. The growing plurality within society soon showed itself in Christianity with a plethora of newly formed denominations that offered diverse systems of interpreting what it meant to be a Christian in the world. Further to this, the growing plurality of religions offered Christians, so often disaffected with the church, unprecedented opportunity to explore new spiritual perspectives. This has meant in many cases not the rejection of Christianity so much as the deepening of people's religious insight and feelings by being exposed to the symbols of meaning of other faiths, as well as their meditative and other devotional practices.

What we have seen then, is not the disappearance of Christianity, but its role in society being brought into sharp relief. Even as early as the French revolution, many predicted that Christianity would be washed away as it lay soaking in the soapsuds of secularisation. Europe was dominated up to the First European War<sup>81</sup> by the rationalistic humanistic worldview of the Enlightenment, which saw human history as constantly ascending both morally and scientifically/technically. Even last century, sociologists such as Max Weber and Auguste Comte (in Küng 1995:762) believed that the stain of religion would be cleaned out by the power of rationalization (self-

determination, emancipation) and demystification (control of the world, breaking free of mythical/theological obfuscation). The mythic God was well and truly dead. The Catholic (mythic level) response to all of this was to radicalise its bureaucratic and centralized organizational structures by sacralizing through the infallibility doctrine. Protestants (mythic rational level) found solace by concentrating in a quite literalist way on the Bible. This did little to win friends among the church's intellectual critics with their enlightened (rational level) ideologies. Fast-growing urban populations, largely composed of industrial proletariat workers were, along with the intelligentsia, increasingly indifferent to Christianity. Christianity was no longer a dominating factor in people's lives, but merely part of a sub-system in the wider social structure of science, law, politics and art. Hans Küng (1995:764) quotes the theologian and sociologist Karl Gabriel, who recognized that since being "forced into a social form shaped by mass culture and the market, the religious traditions [were] directly accessible to individuals, are [were] losing their character as destiny and [were thus] becoming the objects of individual selection and choice."

The church may well have been founded within a world of religious plurality. Its phenomenal growth in the Mediterranean and European world caused it to dominate the reaches of its far-reaching world for two millennia. However, in the modern world, Christianity finds itself in a world facing religions with a very different developmental status to the ones it encountered all those years ago. These religions were not comparable to those early mythic level religions that Christianity had encountered, in the process of declining into dire decadence as they sought to appease a militant Caesar or the uncaring gods on Mount Olympus. These are no longer the unsystematic, polytheistic or animistic religions that had lost hold of the hearts of its adherents. It is no surprise that people within those early religious systems found the

new vibrancy of the preached Christian Gospel to be truly inspiring and liberating. However, the tables have now turned. Is it not Christianity that has to answer for its inability to hold the hearts of its adherents? Has not Christianity moved far away from the simplicity of the direct revelation of Jesus and the early disciples? The world is no longer so easily convinced by the truth claims of the Christians. There is an upsurge of the vibrancy and sense of purpose among religions such as Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism that has almost abruptly shocked Christians into realizing their need for new ways of conceptualising and addressing a religious pluralism that no amount of wishful thinking, militaristic rhetoric or “power evangelism” will simply make go away. The question inevitably arises: is there only one correct religious way of living? Is there only one correct culture, or philosophy, or economic system? The answer is simple: “The universe of meaning has no centre” (in Knitter 1992:5). No longer can one claim one’s own religion, country, and consciousness of truth, beauty and justice as the centre of the universe around which all other opinions ought to congregate. Christians have had to respond to this new awareness of the reality of the multiplicity of all life, especially religious life, in many ways, depending on their level of response-ability and worldview. Some, as we have seen, have viewed plurality through the lens of their tried and trusted rational-mythological frameworks. They cry foul and insist that the Lord of this World is having his fiendish way with leading peoples into delusion and sin and *maya*. How can there be any compromise, say the mythic-literal Christians, with the devil who, parading as an angel of light, comes to people disguised as a religious guru, or bean-sprout eating, ecologically minded humanist, intent on misleading the remnant from the Way, the Truth and the Life? Those within the rational framework, on the other hand, have tended to think of plurality as something to tolerate until they could come up with some overarching

master plan to round up all the religions into the Truth, systemically conceived in Christian terms. Here we find a vision of religious unity that attempts to work at somehow removing those annoying historical, social, cultural and spiritual differences that so damnably dog the differing faiths. Their (sometimes unconscious) desire is to arrive at a point at which the common essences can be institutionalised into a system (usually one's own). This system can then purify and then absorb all the others into an overarching and interdependent whole. Of course, the interdependence must be governed by the one Truth that *their* religion already knows and worships.

Those who have matured into the centauric level and beyond for the most part joyfully welcome plurality as being the way things are, as being the very Suchness of life, the heart of reality. "Pluralism does not result simply from the limitations of the human mind to 'get it all together'" says Paul Knitter (1985:6). "Without multiplicity, without the many others, our world – from atoms to molecules to plants to bugs to humans – would not be able to function and exist. Reality is essentially pluriform: complex, rich intricate, mysterious. 'Pluralism is not the mere justification of opinions, but the realization that the real is more than the sum of all possible opinions.'"

Equipped with both a postconventional identity and morality, people are able to move beyond the need to conform to their own religion's or society's expectations and norms. What truth is, what has value, will be so irrespective of whether the religion agrees that it is so or not. Truth is truth in itself. There is the freedom to seek that Truth even in the faith of others, and even if it means having to change one's own perception of Truth in order to understand the wider dimensions of a Truth that is never fully captured in conceptual thinking.

Yet, is it not typically human to stress those truths and values that benefit me and mine? How it affects or harms others is not always as important, or not always taken sufficiently into account. In the process of seeking a postconventional faith, lies the possibility for self-service and self-deception. When that which works for one religion is proclaimed as universally true, and binding for all other religions, the proclamation of that truth has become a means of exploiting other faiths. For every step taken into a deeper, more universal embrace, lies increasingly subtler dangers of placing ones own faith upon the throne that belongs to God alone; the “dialectics of progress.” In order for a postconventional religious identity to be based on genuinely universal values, those values ought to be sourced from more than just one’s own faith. Every effort should be made at an open and unhindered communication with adherents of all faiths. This process will tend to unite and shape them into a “new collective identity at the level of concrete action, in the formation of a new global order” (Habermas in Knitter 1992:11).

#### 4.4 Rational response-ability (Upper Left Quadrant)

The capacity for rational perspectivism brings such an increase in the good, the true and the beautiful, such liberation from the need to conform to the norms and expectations of past spiritual norms, there is no wonder, as Wilber (2000:145) puts it, it was immediately called “The Enlightenment.” There is, nevertheless, much hubris on this level, enough to prevent the further emergence of the centauric level. In it can be found a certainty, even an unshakable faith, in the power of rationality to overcome all shallowness, where evil and sin is relegated to the realm of mere ignorance, and the need for a power to save the self and the world from it is seen as quaint

mythology<sup>82</sup>. What then, does the rational level look like from the inside for the Christian dialogian? Again, we turn to a more playful approach of a short story with the hope that this would help to connect with our own rational level faith that remains even if we have progressed.

Christianity in its many diverse forms really does make perfect sense when viewed historically, even though God always remains an unfathomable mystery. I am constantly struggling against the obscurantism of those Christians who refuse to look at the historical reality of Christianity, confusing myth with facts. Fortunately, serious attention has recently been given to the absolutistic claims about divine revelation and ultimate truth. This suggests to me that we have become self-conscious about Christian faith in new ways, ways that fundamentally change the tasks and methods of theology vis-à-vis other religions.<sup>83</sup> It seems a narrow sort of impoverishment to refuse to learn from differing ways of being human, however alien they may at first seem. We must learn to encounter the other religious and secular communities on equal terms, as sympathetically as we can, to both appreciate their insights into the human condition and the forms of belief and practice they recommend and inculcate.<sup>84</sup>

Yet there is a danger; the doctrine of Scripture taught from the earliest days in the church was that Scripture had dual authorship; men spoke, but God spoke through them (2 Pet. 1:21). Their writings do incorporate all the accidental qualities imposed by their historical, cultural and linguistic situations. To give every part the monochrome, equal evaluation of literalness is nowhere demanded in Scripture and plain foolish. Nevertheless, to reject literalism is

one thing; to throw out divine authorship is another.<sup>85</sup> The Biblical witness remains central to my faith, spirituality and witness. This Agape love of God through Christ has covered the partiality and waywardness of my life. In all I have been justified by an alien grace, certainly not my works or faith. But surely this love chose me not because of my external religious affirmations. Is not this all-encompassing love that justifies my paltry and relative faith capable of justifying a different faith provided, as Kierkegaard<sup>86</sup> said, they are inwardly serious?

Recall that the previous stage of faith had been defined in terms of roles and membership to a particular faith tradition, whereas on the rational level of the interior individual, the person's identity is no longer defined by a composite of one's roles, or one's meaning to others. What forms a coherent sense of self is now an explicitly stated system of meanings that is able to translate the symbols of the faith into conceptual meaning i.e. a "demythologising" stage. James Fowler (1981:182) calls this level the "individuating-reflective" stage of faith development. Here the dialogian has typically to face certain unavoidable tensions on this, our rational level of the Upper Left Quadrant, or personal interiority.

There is first, the conflict in *defining oneself individually* as opposed to by one's group or tradition. For the fundamentalist, what the experts say about other religions is taken to be true. Any doubt or conflicting opinion is proof of apostasy at best, or demonic activity at worst. With the transcendence into the rational level,<sup>87</sup> one takes responsibility for one's own commitments to faith and theological positions, attitudes towards other religions, and personal lifestyle.

Second, there is the growing tension between religious subjectivity, or the power of strongly felt but unexamined religious feelings and beliefs, and the requirements of *critical reflection*.

Third, there is the growing *need for self-fulfilment/self-actualisation* as opposed to being available to serve the needs and uphold the doctrine of a particular faith grouping. This is the stage, then, that lies between serving the needs of the particular group, and the self-transcendent level that houses the desire to serve all humanity and the Kosmos (Bodhisattva ideal). There is largely still the need to serve the needs of the strongly developing ego.

Fourth, there is the strong presence of the tension between being committed to the justice of *promoting the cause of the relative*, versus the still strong desire for the possibility of the absolute, usually identified with one's own ultimate concern. An obvious example of this is that for many Christians on this level, there is the strong desire to see the tenets of Christianity as being truly universal whilst still holding the relative value of other paths. The "anonymous Christian" doctrines show up this tendency rather well.

The strengths of faith at this rational, or individual-reflective level, include the now clear distinction within the self of one's self-identity and one's outlook on life, or worldview. The Christian dialogian can be a fully committed Christian without having to accept all the tenets of the faith, or every Biblical miracle story, at face value. The validity and beauty of other faiths can be appreciated and studied without the compelling need to criticise or proselytise, and with little fear of being converted by that faith. The self, in other words, is no longer held captive, or is no longer embedded in, its belief system. It can thus freely examine and compare its own with other belief



systems. This creates a sense of strong confidence in the mind's ability to solve problems, spot inconsistencies or draw parallels through critical thought. However, here too lies this level's great weakness. The brash assuredness of the rational level leaves life with a certain sterility and meaninglessness, or anomie. It does not take long for the self to become restless with the self-images and worldviews maintained at this level. Anarchic voices from the depth of her or his interior may rise up to challenge their compromises that are inevitable to maintain logical consistencies. These voices on the limits of the conscious mind forcefully fuel the recognition that life is more complex than this stage's logic of clear distinctions and abstract concepts.

These problems, however, serve also as part of the level's redeeming qualities, in that they enable the person to comprehend the level's partial nature, and thus to spur her or him to "press on toward a more dialectical and multileveled approach to life truth" (Fowler 1981:183).

# Chapter 5

## Centauroic level of Christian dialogical responsibility

It is not possible to capture every cultural context in which Christians on the centauroic level engage in dialogue. We know already that no one culture is paradigmatic for all the others. In a sense, then, this section merely samples the myriad available contexts (LL) that face Christians who wish to deepen their faith and spiritual practice (UL), the theology (UR) that arises from the depth plumbed in dialogue, and their attempts to find new ways of being committed to Christ, the Church in a suffering world (LR). Since “theology is rooted in biography”, my musings on contexts are centred on but not limited to those in which I live and move and have my being.

### 5.1 A world of pluralism

South Africa is something of a microcosm of the world. Its myriad vistas of great scenic beauty often remind international visitors of their own azure Mediterranean, or Rocky mountain high, sun-baked Sahara, or rain-drenched tropical rainforest. South Africa’s dazzling mix of people reflects a diversity every bit as impressive as its landscape. Religiously, there is an effervescence and plurality in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg that is, in this the beginning of the third millennium, every bit as dynamic as Devon, Hong Kong or San Francisco. South Africa’s particular religious concerns and problems, in turn, are also not easily separated from those in the rest of the world. Krüger (1995:1) reminds us just how difficult it is to isolate a context as if

it were somehow static. Exploring any religious theme is a never-ending task as it is situated within an ever-changing network of wheels within wheels, which imply past, present, future, as well as economic, political and cultural dimensions.

How could this country separate itself from what may yet prove to be the archetypal symbol of the end of modernity – 9/11? Who of us/those watching CNN could forget the feelings of disbelief as we/they watched in horror the smoke belching from the north tower of the World Trade Centre in New York? Could this/that really be happening? Was/is this perhaps not a sick joke, a newer version of the fear-generating radio broadcast of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*? These confused feelings of horror/disbelief were heightened as the world's cameras captured in real-time a second hijacked plane crashing into the south tower 21 minutes later at 09h06 Eastern Time. Could it be true that this was really happening? Could I be watching the sudden collapse of the south tower in front of my eyes? Yet, as if to drive home the point of Western vulnerability with stark clarity, which no doubt was the intention of the perpetrators, this bizarre scenario repeated itself again as the north tower, exactly 29 minutes later, also disappeared into a cloud of dust, blood and obscurity.

If pluralism means the opening of the liberating prospect of open dialogue with adherents of other faiths, it also means the opening up of the world to the reality of fundamentalist extremists who have no hesitation in foisting upon the world, using this newfound freedom, their own mythological religious worldview. The surrealism of the carnage reminds us that evil possesses an inherent talent for theatrics with to foster self-glorification. What better arena to strut its stuff *en flagrante* than in front of the seemingly omnipresent lenses of the world's cameras?

It is not only the religious fundamentalists that are cause for concern. We ought not to be fooled by pluralism's openness, which also has the ability to subtly hide and foster

invidious greed. Those who operate within the rational frameworks are given endless opportunity to pursue unimaginable wealth without heed either to their own seared consciences, or the cries of a desperate and starving third world. The Transnational Corporations (TNC's) that have become the de facto world government<sup>88</sup> as they increasingly dominate the world economy, are the direct results of postwar planning and policy set the stage for the spectacular growth of American (and to a lesser extent European) companies, reaping enormous profits at the expense of the rest of the world. The effects of current plans for economic globalisation on the world's poorest people mainly in the Third World are devastating. There is an imposition of "free market" policies on the poor, while protectionist measures are guaranteed for the rich, with the IMF and World Bank acting as "bill-collecting agencies for the creditor counties " (Chomsky 1996:129).

The anti-American reaction throughout the Third World, most vividly expressed in 9/11, came as no surprise. Sadly, the American government sought to respond by returning to the safety of a mythic-rationally justified "War on Terror." This war has followed the typical pattern of carefully avoiding the actual finding and eliminating of Osama Bin Laden, who at this time is still presumed to be guilty without the annoying demands for a fair trial in an international court of law. The American industrial-military's newest and finest reason for its continued existence and funding via hard-earned tax dollars is carefully pursued so as to ensure he is never killed or captured, a ploy used successfully during Desert Storm against Saddam Hussein.<sup>89</sup>

It remains the responsibility of religious interlocutors to stand up, be counted, and make a difference in a world threatened with madness. People with radically differing conceptions of the world, of what it means to be human, and of how to address the urgent questions facing all of humanity, have been thrown together into the same

countries and cities and villages with scant or no preparation for dealing with these differences. With the mind-boggling increase in available information about anything and everything, including other religions, we have been made aware, often painfully aware, of the reality of pluralism. Our collective consciousness (that is, the Western intellectual consciousness writ large in the world) has been pressed into the profound realization that there is by no means only one conceivably culture, philosophy or economic system. The vast spectrum of meaning has no one indisputable centre. My own reality, reason, being, or nation is not at the centre of the universe. The nature of the world is intertwined into as conditionalist web of interrelations that renders an “individual” human being a pure abstraction (Krüger 1995:34 f.).

In spite of the massively obvious opportunities for being exploited, this newly achieved awareness of multivalent meaning, of multiplicity must no longer seen as an undesirable state of affairs to be overcome via the Master plan, Master race or Master religion, that seeks to convert the world to its particular point of view. Except those who still operate within a mythic rational paradigm — and they are legion and growing to this day — the world is beginning to be seen precisely in terms of multiplicity; from cells and atoms and flower gardens, to the interpretation of meaning (including religious meaning), to systems of social organization. The awareness of pluralism makes one realize that there is not just one way to be in the world; there are many ways. Yet at the same time, the many cannot simply remain as many, existing in the choices of splendid isolation, heated confrontation, or irenic, uncritical syncretism. Somehow they have to meet and relate in a deeper, integrating embrace that honours all, injures none.

In Wilber’s integral scheme, we have at last arrived at the centauric level — the integration of body, mind and the first glimmerings of the transpersonal realm of

glorious Spirit. The challenges for Christian dialogue are enormous, the possible pathologies endemic. Yet, the theological, relational and spiritual possibilities too are endless. It is clearly impossible to give an overview of all aspects of dialogue taking place at this level. Centauric dialogue may be seen to be taking place between many different faiths at this time, especially between Christian and Buddhist scholars, monks and lay people.

Perhaps one of the most profound examples of interfaith dialogue at the centauric level is J.S. Krüger's book *Along Edges: Religion in South Africa; Bushman, Christian, Buddhist* (1995). This work represents a synthesis of his thought that traces certain themes from some of his earlier works. This has been, inter alia, to address the crisis in the fundamental premises of mainstream "white" Christian theology given its seeming inability to deal with both the socio-religious dilemmas facing many South Africans, and with the effective study of other religions, especially Buddhism. Krüger (1995:4) takes the concepts of "togetherness", "relativity" and "uniqueness" and weaves them an alternative African tapestry of religions – an appropriate and viable alternative to the religious *apartheid* that for so long dominated the religious scene in the country. This religious *apartheid* found and still finds its security in a basic attitude of separateness between human beings in their societies (LR), cultures (LL), theologies (UR) and spiritualities (UL).

Krüger's (1995:5) clear characterisation of religious *apartheid* closely aligns itself with religion at our mythic and mythic-rational levels. He finds four basic attitudes on this mythic level that ties in well with our previous analysis. First, there is religious *conformism*, which subordinates individual experience to group thinking. Secondly, a religious *dogmatism* that tends towards fixed, immovable standpoints. Thirdly, a religious *exclusivism* that overwhelmingly emphasises the differences between

groups, which in consequence leads to a display of a profound *negativism* towards other groups, the fourth basic religious attitude.

The new premises for dialogue that Krüger advocates as the basis for “religion in a new key” is precisely dialogue at the centauric levels and beyond. This is a dialogue that is truly on the edge or on the boundary between “totalising order” and “scattered fragmentation”. It is a dialogue that takes seriously the prophetic voices of the mystics of the faiths who may at times be thought to be on the outside of official orthodoxy. What Krüger advocates is a “conditionalist framework” for dialogue, which he uses to explore the thresholds that separate and divide, yet also join Buddhism, Christianity and the religious outlook of the indigenous San people of Africa (Bushmen).

It is, as we have said, to a mere fraction of the possibilities for dialogical frameworks that we now turn in order to gain some insight into the Christian response, response-ability, responsibility and social structure of dialogue and its potential pathologies at this level. We thus continue to explore and advocate Krüger’s conditionalist framework as an example of the kind of hermeneutical responsibility to which Christians<sup>90</sup> on the centauric level are invited to adopt in their dialogical approach to other faiths.

## 5.2 Christian responsibility at the centauric level (Lower Left Quadrant)

With his conditionalist framework, Krüger manages to create a truly centauric level system of religious meaning that builds upon the insights of the previous levels, yet

manages to transcend the limitations and divisiveness of those levels, weaving them into a holistic embrace. Other scholars who have achieved a similar level of centauric integration are Paul Knitter in his later work *Jesus and the other names* (1996), John Keenan's work *The meaning of Christ: A Mahayana theology* (1989) and John Cobb's *Transforming Christianity and the world* (1999).

Krüger's hermeneutical framework might itself be described as a playful interweaving of various traditions: There is, firstly, the Western philosophical tradition laid by William James, Carl Jung and A.N. Whitehead. Secondly, Krüger employs the models of theology that have sought to replace "supranaturalist" theologies, or in Wilber's terms, those relying on mythological projections of an essentially transcendent God "out there." Krüger seeks to utilise the insights of theologians such as Ernst Troeltsch, Paul Tillich, Antony Fernando, John Cobb and David Tracy. Thirdly, Krüger braids into his framework the conditionalist-friendly, non-substantialising and dynamic views of God with which we have been blessed through the various Christian mystical traditions (Scotus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, Nicolaus Cusanus and others). Fourthly, Krüger relies heavily on the metatheistic<sup>91</sup>, interpenetrating and conditionalist understanding of human experience that Buddhism, especially in its earliest and most original expressions, offers to the world of hermeneutical, religious understanding.

What, precisely, is this conditionalist framework? Krüger (1995:21) recognises that the world as we feel it in our guts ('experience') is a "dynamic interplay of interdependent, mutually conditioning forces and relations" which encompasses not only our view of the world, but also a view of our very viewing of that world, our feelings, knowledge, thought processes and insights. Conditionality, or "radical relationality" is comfortable with the notion that plurality and coherence do coincide



in a balance of mutuality. Having plurality without coherence is an invitation to pure chaos. Coherence without plurality would lead unerringly back towards mythic imperialism. Working from a different perspective, then, Krüger's understanding of "radical relationality" parallels Wilber's integral approach, with Krüger's "coherence" correlating with Wilber's "agency", and Krüger's "plurality" correlating with Wilber's "communion". Agency, recall, is that aspect of a holon that allows it to differentiate from other holons in order to assert its own being or existence. If agency goes too far into pathological agency, it becomes imperialistic, or cancerous. Communion allows the holon to be in community with holons on the same level. However, going too far into dissociation would mean that the holon is lost – Krüger's "pure chaos".

In a superb description of the interrelatedness of holons, Krüger (1995:22,23) talks about the process by which religious meaning emerges, or reveals itself concretely, in terms of the "plurality of specific events, cohering in expanding circles and merging with wider fields of events." Krüger appreciates the fact that any one religion, or aspect within any one religion, is absolutely unique in its unrepeatability and originality.

Each event is irreducible either to smaller units constituting it [it cannot be reduced to its constituent holons without remainder] or larger units encompassing it [holons that embrace this event cannot be defined by it]; as interacting with other equally special units [interaction of same level holons]; and as part of larger units until eventually ('ultimately') it is comprehended in the widest context perceptible [ the next higher stage of development that is established].

Of course, Krüger recognises that there is a limit to our ability to perceive the "ultimate" or "totality." The pluralistic world is ever changing that leaves us with no fixed and indisputable position. This does not mean, however, that the only alternative

is radical relativity, or that there is no meaning and no truth. This would be plurality without coherence. There are processes that offer definite and dependable, or coherent, trends. These trends are directly comparable this with Wilber's description of "deep structures", which offer a foundation with which to speak with conviction about how one understands and relates to and through the Truth. Yet, my truth itself will at some time have to be related to the *ad infinitum*, the ultimate, which puts everything in creation into question.

The conditionalist approach is aware of the human need to identify, collate and define specific aspects of the dynamic flux of the world. Most religio-philosophical frameworks operating in the rational level work with carefully crafted abstractions that separate their own system or religion from others. These frameworks require one to suspend one's beliefs and premises of one's own faith ("epoche") in order to appreciate fully and to enter into "anOther" faith.

Without discounting the value of these earlier approaches, or better yet, by fully integrating them, a centauric or conditionalist approach goes further and faces squarely the consequences of life as an ever-changing flux, with no fixed centre.

Mostly, it finds itself in-between set positions, perspectives and identities, hence the title of Krüger's book, *Along edges*. Even the identity of the dialogical participants is not fixed. Are they Christian? Are they Buddhist? Does the acceptance of some doctrine, ethic or principle of the "other" faith make her less Buddhist? More Christian? A conditionalist approach would be quite comfortable with the ambivalence created by dialogue precisely because this is where creativity is to be found.

Does this mean that Krüger wishes to imply that the differences between the religions are illusory? Could one infer from the conditionalist framework that ultimately all

religions are essentially the same thing? Do they all aim for essentially the same goal of human emancipation? The centauric or conditionalist position has the inner space to accept these as very real possibilities, but only as possibilities among myriad creative possibilities. It is, for example, equally possible that religions are so irreconcilably different, that their entire gestalts do not lend themselves at all to mutual understanding, which renders all attempts at interfaith dialogue including this entire paper superfluous! Yet, it is only through truly respecting multivalent differences that these questions are provided with answers. New possibilities heretofore unimagined are invited to arise precisely because creativity in dialogue is encouraged.

There can be no shying away from even the most exclusivist claims of superiority. There is no attempt to discount and discredit the subtle attempts that nudge one towards an inclusivist smothering. Nor, indeed, does one hide from the extreme pluralists who claim that no position can be shown to be wrong except their own, unconsciously untouchable position. It is only by bravely exposing oneself to the cacophony and the maddening disorder of the randomised Many, as well as to the demands of the authoritarian One, that the voice of the middle way might be heard calling everyone into a new, an heretofore unimagined, place of mutual respect and harmony. Right here, on this threshold place, something truly profound begins to happen. The meaning of who Jesus is shifts once again from the core concept of Word, or Logos, into a mystic realm of meaning which is constituted not so much by belief in the doctrines of the Fathers, not so much by thinking and judging, but by the immediacy of contact as a lived experience in the now moment.

Krüger's conditionalist framework is, then, one example of a number of growing frameworks for dialogue that are becoming available on the centauric level. One criticism is that, because he has not explicitly made room for a transcendence of the centauric into the psychic, subtle and causal realms, he tends to collapse these later levels into his centauric level framework. Krüger's knowledge and personal experience with and in these higher realms is obvious given the focus of his work (see 1989, 1995). Thus, were he to acknowledge, specify and incorporate these levels into his dialogical framework in a more precise way, his framework would show closer correlations with Wilber at these higher stages even though (and this lends credence to both approaches) he has formulated his approach without consulting Wilber at all. Even without this, however, Krüger still offers a comprehensive framework for the growth of dialogue from the rational to the centauric, which is where many of the current academic problems with regard to dialogue reside. The conditionalist framework is exactly the sort of well-researched and relevant template that is vital for contemporary dialogue, and will serve the dialogical community admirably for years to come.

### 5.3 Christian response/theology of dialogue (Upper Right) at the vision logic/centaur level

The centauric, conditionalist Christian who chooses to work out a theological response to dialogue will find this to be no simple responsibility. Those who operate largely in the rational realm will generally misunderstand her. Those on the mythic-rational level will without fail lambaste her as a New Age fraud, intent on misleading God's people for Satan's own ends. This is very often a painful journey, since the

centaur has within herself had to journey through the previous levels and thus knows the arguments intimately, for they were once her own deeply held convictions. She knows that her well-meaning colleagues are not simply wrong, but are, rather more complicatedly, ever so *partial* in their assessment and understanding of the centauric theological position/s. Her detractors have yet to take the plunge into the often quite scary depths of new levels of liberation into the mystic realm of meaning.

One of the main theological factors that enabled the shift from the mythic rational to the rational level, according to Langdon Gilkey (in Hick and Knitter 1987:38), was the shift in the balance between the requirements of faith and those of love. On the mythic level, defending the faith is regarded as an unquestionable Christian demand, and practically speaking, outranks any obligation to love. In Protestant mythic rational history, Calvin's relation to Servetus is paradigmatic. Today, CNN images of cheering Muslims on the streets of Ramallah after 9/11 offer stark testimony to the continued existence of the mythic level demand to protect the purity of the faith.

With the shift to the rational level of theological discourse, killings in the name of faith became morally and theologically indefensible. The growing realization of the historicity, and hence the relativity of all doctrine and creeds of faiths (we have examined this already), made it inconceivable that the same agape of God that justified the sinful and incomplete Christian, should be unable to do so for those who were outside the borders of Christian practice and doctrine.

This all meant that Christian theology at the rational level could now concede to the general validity and efficacy of the symbols, doctrines and practices of the world's faith traditions. And naturally this was inclined to lead into the understandable desire to interpret one's own theology and symbols in a way that neither offended nor excluded the others. Seiichi Yagi (in Hick and Knitter 1987:117 ff) offers an excellent

example of a dialectical and interpenetrative Christology that reinterprets the “I” of Jesus from a Buddhist perspective that attempts to move Christians beyond an exclusivistic and inclusivistic understanding of the uniqueness of Christ<sup>92</sup>.

Yet, a nagging issue persists with the classic pluralist model that might be summed up quite simply: a pluralistic theology of interfaith dialogue tends to water down its own theological treasures that are a result precisely of its uniqueness. Jesus seen as a Bodhisattva; Jesus viewed as an incarnation of Krishna; Jesus as probably a prophet preceding Mohammed; these just do not do justice to the Christian understanding of Jesus as the only Son of God, and as the Second Person of the Triune God. Too often the liberal rational theological efforts to transcend the particularities of the various faiths begin to look suspiciously as particularistic as the faiths they seek to reconcile. When religious symbols are translated into a religious or philosophical context alien to it, they are lifted out of the gestalt or complex of religious symbols and thought patterns that form a meaningfully coherent and interrelated whole, and their power, precisely as a symbol of the divine, is thereby lost.

A conditionalist or centauric theology does not feel the need to in any way tone down certain doctrines that may appear to an adherent of another faith meaningless, offensive or otherwise “unacceptable”.<sup>93</sup> Jesus hanging on a cross means salvation within the Christian gestalt, whilst it offends sensitive Buddhists. A smiling statue of the Buddha means the bliss of transcendent enlightenment beyond the ravages of illusion, suffering and death within the Buddhist gestalt, but is offensive to Christians struggling to provide a theological basis for action among the poor and oppressed and suffering. Which doctrine or image is it better to tone down? The question is as meaningless as it is unnecessary. Dialogue at this level means precisely that the “scandal of particularity” that is inherent in every faith expression is faced squarely.

The dissonances and contradictions that the meeting between diametrically opposed religious, theological and doctrinal gestalts generate are no longer seen as undesirable.

This very chaotic situation is the very ground of potentially new and heretofore undiscovered insights and creative solutions to past and present dilemmas.

Furthermore, a conditionalist theology also has no need to interpret all religions as a particular expression of the classical understanding of the perennial philosophy. Here, it was thought that a mystical core could be grasped by the intellect and articulated in an all-embracing philosophy that has no need of the exoteric, outer clothing of each religion. Thus, each religion is now both true and relative: true for its own community but relative to the other true revelations in other faith communities. But this approach is all too easily deconstructed. Why should what I believe have no real significance outside of my community? Does this not fly in the face of one's faith's inherent claim to having universal significance? And if what is truly significant is only its mystical core, then do not other aspects, such as commitment and obedience to God, or the selfless serving one's community, or creative political action, become redundant? If the raising of one religion above all others is somewhat odious, then the elevating of one aspect of all religions (mystic core) above all others into a type of *über*-theology is every bit as malodorous.

How then, does a conditionalist theology avoid the ruse of radical relativity that drains every religion of anything of significance to offer? "Ecumenical tolerance," warns Gilkey (in Hick and Knitter 1987:44) "represents an impressive moral and religious gain, a step toward love and understanding. But it has its own deep risks, and one of them is this spectre of relativity, this loss of any place to stand, the elimination of the very heart of the religious as ultimate concern."

A Christian theology of dialogue on the centauric level would look within its own symbols and recognized orthodoxies to find a way forward. This is not to say that misunderstandings will not occur among dialogical partners. And, of this you can be sure, even greater misunderstandings will occur among Christian theologians operating out of a rational, and especially mythic rational level. These theologians will attempt to understand a theology that operates from within the centauric levels and beyond. This happens, interestingly, in spite of the fact that theologians at the centauric, subtle and causal levels<sup>94</sup> are quite often some of the most orthodox theologians within the confines of their own faith<sup>95</sup>.

The misunderstandings accrue precisely because these transpersonal or mystical theologians operate with a clear understanding of what Keenan (1989:110 ff.) identifies in the work of various mystics as the “double tradition” of theology.

Dionysius the Aeropagite, for example, sets up a double movement which first moves away from “an extroverted, positive theology that would cling to and defend its names and images as expressing the real truth about God” towards a negative theology that “rests in the cessation of conceptual thinking and divine ignorance.” Once one has realized such “ignorance” as a cathartic non-clinging to the very process of conceptual thinking itself, there is the second gentle movement back to the employment of positive symbolic affirmations about God. These new statements about the divine are expressed and used legitimately precisely because they remain within the “light” of the previous divine, apophatic darkness. (Keenan 1989:111) explains:

Names do not refer to their sensed images or understood concepts, but rather, meaning is understood as insight through names and images into what is beyond names and images. Theology... is [now understood to be] a mental construct reflecting the underlying consciousness of the one who theologises. Extraverted [rational level] theologians who imagine they are dealing with external meaning units called essences use positive statements to “explain” the



mysteries, while symbolic theologians [centauric level and beyond] use names and images to introduce one into those mysteries.

We see a similar appreciation for this double tradition in another centauric (or more accurately, causal level) theologian - John Ruusbroec (1985) who, perhaps even better than Eckhart, was able to overcome the difficulties imposed by a theology that relies on its final destination being a darkness beyond distinction. For Eckhart, recall, the fullness of the Trinitarian God was to be found in the Godhead beyond all categories. But once the mind passes all human categories, how is it possible to determine anything beyond? One of Ruusbroec's classic contributions to mystical theology was his radical emphasis on the Trinitarian character of God. Ruusbroec (1985:xiif) showed that God's being, precisely as Trinity, is never at rest, or never permanently withdrawn into its own darkness. Thus, while the soul might begin its journey by moving into God's silence, it continues beyond this silence as part of the Father's generative act both into the image of the Son, and out further into the otherness of created things.

Unlike Eckhart, then, Ruusbroec did not overcome the theological dead end of ultimate negation by positing an unfathomable unity beyond the Trinity. Rather, for Ruusbroec, the Father is the unity, or the One, who is the fertile silence that must speak, or yield light. The silence of the Father is utterly pregnant with the Word. The soul who seeks God takes part in the movement within the Trinity. As Dupré (in Ruusbroec 1985:xiii) explains:

Hence, once arrived in the desert of the Godhead, the contemplative mind moves with the same divine dynamism with which the Father moves into his divine image and into the multiplicity of creation. The words in which [Ruusbroec] describes this intra-Trinitarian movement of the soul are as daring as any ever written: "To comprehend and understand God as he is in himself, above and beyond all likenesses, is *to be God with God*, without intermediary... We cannot become God and lose our creaturely state – that is

impossible. But if we remain entirely in ourselves, separated from God, we would be miserable and deprived of salvation. We will therefore feel ourselves as being entirely in God and entirely in ourselves.

We have here a theology that is far beyond that which is to be expected on the centauric level alone. Nevertheless, as we saw in Krüger's conditionalist framework, the contours of these deeper level theologies will already be emerging and becoming apparent at the centauric level.

A centauric Christian theology of dialogue will not see other religions as utterly opposed to itself (exclusivism). Nor will it see them as hierarchically inferior to itself and ultimately to be subsumed within its own superior understanding (inclusivism). Neither will it see itself as a means of converging its own ideals, practices and tenets with other faiths in order to arrive at some essentialist unity (some aspects of pluralism). Rather, all religions are seen as “relative focuses on the religious ideal to see panoramically” (Krüger 1995:101). This means that while a religion cannot be conceptualised and captured in a final dogma (UR) or institution (LR) or cultural form (LL) or even spirituality (UL), each offers a unique perspective on ultimate mystery without which our understanding of the whole would be severely compromised. Thus, when dialogically relating two or more religions, justice needs to be done to the uniqueness of each as a deeply precious, organically growing organism.

#### 5.4 Centauric Level Interiority - Faith/Spirituality (Upper Left)

I will not provide an “interior perspective” or “I” language description of the centauric level as I have done in the last two chapters. This is simply because in our

Introduction we traced the emergence of the centauric level in Knitter's life experiences. I simply cannot improve on his very personal and very real journey. Let us immediately proceed to a discussion of the centaur in this Quadrant.

We recall that development in the Upper Left Quadrant includes that which is interior to the individual holon. For the purposes of this essay we have chosen to focus specifically on faith development. Faith is never easily defined, and less so the deeper we progress through the levels. Faith, as a line of development, unfolds through a series of invariable, sequential levels, (prepersonal, personal, transpersonal). But the progress of the individual's faith itself is always dialectical; a stop-start affair that more often than not refuses to be neatly defined.

The centauric level of faith emerges out of the late rational because of, among other things, the encounter with another faith tradition that comes to disrupt the neatness of the logic of the previous faith, which means that the truth claims of that faith can no longer be kept at a neat, rational distance. Beyond clear distinctions and abstract concepts, there is a call towards a world of a more nuanced, dialectical and multileveled faith system. Here, one learns to become comfortable moving within patterns of interrelatedness. Here, one feels a familiarity with meaningful paradoxes that allow for a more far-reaching freedom of one's faith experience.

James Fowler (1981:185) ascribes to this "conjunctive" stage of faith a deepened capacity for "dialectical knowing." The knower allows the complex world of faith to make itself known in its own way before relating that to her or his own way of knowing. Here, then, is the beginning of the maturation of a truly integrative dialogue in which through a process of mutual speaking and hearing, the "knower and the known converse in an I-Thou relationship." The dialogian feels secure in the

trustworthiness of her or his faith. There is no pressure to deny the truth of one's own faith in the light of the truth disclosed in that of the Other.

What the mystic calls 'detachment' characterises [this centauric stage of faith's] willingness to let reality speak its word, regardless of the impact of that word on the security or self-esteem of the knower. I speak here of an intimacy in knowing that celebrates, reverences and attends to the 'wisdom' evolved in things as they are, before seeking to modify, control or order them to fit prior categories (Fowler 1981:185).

Faith at this stage involves a going beyond the explicit boundaries of identity that the rational stage worked at so hard to construct. It knows beyond any doubt that truth is more multidimensional, more organically interdependent than most theories of truth can account for. However, this does not imply that it gets caught either in the bottomless pit of unchallenged relativism or in the arrogance of arid intellectualism. In other words, it realises that just because all symbols are partial, this does not permit anything all that claims to be holy to be uncritically accepted as such. Centauric faith has not lost its hard-fought for ability to discern critically evil that parades as an angel of light. Child sacrifice is wrong no matter how much some misled New-Ager might wish to imbue it with Cosmic and Divine significance.

Also, whilst understanding all too well that symbols and rituals and doctrines are partial, centauric faith no longer believes that everything can be deconstructed without meaningful remainder. Centauric faith has moved beyond the need to demythologise its faith symbols as a means of reaching the end-point of understanding those symbols.

We saw how the rational (or Individuative-Reflective) stage of faith desired to draw all symbolic meaning into its own interpretive framework. The result was that value and significance were ascribed to that symbol only within the limits of the

assumptions and commitments that already informed the dialogian's understanding. This meant that the symbol could not be allowed to speak for itself, to challenge the dialogian into new and heretofore unplumbed depths of meaning.

No. Centauric faith has already experienced the breaking of its dearest symbols and the "vertigo of relativity." But it cannot remain satisfied with the reduction of symbolic meaning to conceptual categories. Given its understanding of the organic character and interrelatedness of reality, it refuses to separate symbol and symbolised. It humbly allows the symbol to speak for itself in order to reveal the powerful residues of meaning that escape all reductive strategies of meaning which normally would assure our power over that which is revealed, but also obscures the deeper truths. This is what Paul Ricoeur (in Fowler 1981:187) calls a "second naïveté," which is not to be equated with the mythic literal stage's precritical relationship of unbroken participation in symbolically mediated reality.<sup>96</sup> It carries forward all the capacities of the rational critical stage, but no longer trusts these to avoid all self-deception in its attempt to encounter truth in new ways.

Thus, faith here will humbly submit itself again to truth's desire to reveal itself in places and ways and people and situations far beyond anything we have encountered before. At the same time, the mere fact that there are definite socio-cultural and linguistic limits placed upon any individual's or religious group's faith experience, does not imply that their symbols are not adequate means of mediating the divine. Centauric faith can and does offer its truth unashamedly even while it simultaneously listens to the truths expressed by its dialogical partner.

The new strength, then, of the centauric level of faith is its ability to participate in one's own group's most sacred and powerful meanings, while realizing that they are partial and relative, and ultimately distort the true apprehension of transcendent

reality<sup>97</sup>. The centauric faith has been grasped by the possibility of a worldwide, inclusive community of faith that is not restricted to one religious tradition and its theology, community, symbols and spirituality<sup>98</sup>. Interfaith dialogue at this level is not a luxury; it is a moral and religious imperative. Justice is demanded for all, not just for a chosen few.

Nevertheless, the paradoxical understanding of faith at the centauric stage may well lead to the danger of cynicism, or passivity and inaction. This is due to the person at this stage feeling an overwhelming sense of aloneness with her loyalties divided between her own faith and that of a vision of an embracing, enfolding and ecumenically transformed future. She may feel that her own faith tradition is effective and true, yet may be frustrated at the seeming lack of insight of many of her co-religionists. She sees the possibility of a world transformed by a deep ecumenism that includes people of all faiths. The embrace of this ecumenism does not exclude other areas of God's creation, be it beautiful or ugly, noble or tragic. The lion truly does begin to lie next to the lamb. However, she may also feel that the burden of the paradoxes generated on this level is too great for her to carry alone. This tension may lead either to a cynical withdrawal back to a late rational or postmodern deconstruction of all and sundry, where faith systems are seen to intersect rather meaninglessly, or it may lead to what Fowler calls "universalising faith".

### 5.4.1 Late centauric/early psychic - universalising faith

The centauric level in Wilber's developmental scheme stands, as it were, on the very verge of the transpersonal domain, taking up into itself matter, life and mind and going beyond into the domain of the soul. The word "transpersonal," as we have seen,

can cause a lot of confusion, but it means quite simply that place where the person is no longer confined exclusively within the empirical ego or self concept. The observer or Witness “transcends the isolated person in you and opens instead – from within or from behind, as Emerson said – onto a vast expanse of awareness no longer obsessed with the individual bodymind, no longer a respecter or abuser of persons, no longer fascinated by the passing joys and set-apart sorrows of the lonely self, but standing still in silence as an opening or clearing through which light shines, not from the world but into it...” (Wilber 1994:281).

One is able to trace a movement from a religiocentric faith that knows its own faith to be the one and only. From this position immune from self-examination, faith moves towards the earlier stages of the rational level. It no longer has to dogmatically assert the superiority of its faith, but can now prove its superiority to others if it so desires, but simultaneously can concede that others do have something to offer the world given God’s gracious provision of a general revelation. Then comes a faith rooted in a worldcentric identity with people of all faiths. This was the late rational/early centaur’s universal, postconventional and paradoxical awareness of faith that informs its stance on interfaith dialogue. Now, however, there has been a deepening into an identity, or conscious union, with all of manifest reality itself; not just with human beings, but with all nurture, nature, and knowledge (i.e. all quadrants): what Ken Wilber has called “Kosmic consciousness.” This is a direct realization or apprehension of the common source of all things, but which itself cannot be analysed by the rational mind, because it embraces and transcends mind, mind does not embrace the source thus cannot “apprehend” that Source.

We have strayed now into Wilber’s “psychic level” of faith, which is somewhat beyond our defined area of research. Nevertheless it is important to be aware of the

psychic level because it is the realm of “nature mysticism,” which must not be confused with an egocentric or a biocentric regression. Kosmic consciousness is an experienced identity with all manifestation in the sense that it embraces nature in a way that undercuts the subject/object dualism. Every aspect of nature is bathed in God’s Presence and Spirit, but that is not to say that nature *is* God (magical indissociation,) or nature is *split* from God (mythic indissociation), but that the dualistic split between God/nature, sacred/profane, this-worldly/other-worldly is at last gently overcome. The gift and mystery of the psychic level of faith, or universalising faith, is that it “allows us to *recognize ourselves in each other*, beyond illusions of separation and duality” (Wilber 1994:292). Inter-faith dialogue has at last become a fully-fledged intra-faith dialogue in the sense of me talking to my very self as made manifest in a different form, person and faith. This is not to be confused in any way with a wish-fulfilling projection of the egoic self that desires others to be as I want them to be, but my true Self in all its paradoxical and even painful otherness that I have been given the grace to accept as being truly I.

The transition from conjunctive (early centauric) to universalising faith (late centauric/early psychic) consists in the overcoming of the paradoxes that characterise the conjunctive level. This is achieved via a path that does not count the cost to the self, but also has a clear understanding of transcendent moral, ethical and theological values, a process that Fowler (1981:200) describes as a “moral and ascetic actualisation of the universalising apprehensions.” The person is now utterly devoted to universalising compassion that all too often offends more less embracing views of justice, self-preservation and survival. Fowler (1981:200-201):

The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of inclusive and fulfilled



human community [and are] often experienced as subversive of the structures (including religious structures) by which we sustain our individual and corporate survival, security, and significance. Many persons in this [transpersonal] stage die at the hands of those they hope to change... The rare persons who may be described by this stage have a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us. Particularities are cherished because they are vessels of the universal, and thereby valuable apart from any utilitarian considerations. Life is both loved and held to loosely. Such persons are ready for fellowship with persons at any of the other stages and from any other faith tradition.<sup>99</sup>

Put another way, these persons have an unprecedented response-ability with which to embark upon a journey of dialogue with people of faiths no longer considered to be other, or Other, but as an integral part of their very "I"ness, or self-identity.

## 5.5 Centauric level social patterns (LR)

We should at this point once again recall Wilber's distinction between deep and surface structures. The deep structures are those sequential stages of development that are invariable across cultures and traditions i.e. mythic, mythic-rational, rational, centauric, psychic, subtle and causal. The surface structures are the actual manifestations of those deep structures. At each level, there will be an infinite number of ways in which the deep structure will appear. Profound differences will be observed both *within* Christianity and *between* Christianity and the other faiths at each stage precisely because the surface structures show remarkable creativity. One cannot reasonably expect to capture the vast diversity of these manifestations in just a few examples.

However, if one were to identify some of the underlying structures, these would give some indication of the level at which the dialogue were taking place. Interfaith dialogue engaged in by a Christian at the centauric level, then, ought to show

evidence of the same deep structures as a Buddhist dialogian at the centauric level.

For this reason, any description of the “shape” or manifestation of form within each of the four Quadrants has about it a sense of arbitrariness, not in the description of the level itself, or the basic patterns that are demonstrably similar across traditions, but rather in the way in which those structures take shape in concrete examples.

What then, would one expect to find when dealing with the structure of the community (LR) of a centauric level Christian? For the most part, centauric Christians would not find themselves in a community of the similarly depthed in most local churches, which tend to be highly variegated, and the large majority of people are at the mythic rational or rational levels. Quite often, the centaur’s experience would be on of finding their traditional faith community increasingly alienated and alienating. These people who have spent time growing spiritually, emotionally and mentally are as a rule deeply aware of the criticisms that come from encounters with other faith traditions, and realize that in many ways Christianity has been both arrogant and oppressive. This is while the majority of people in the Christian community remain untroubled by the criticisms that come from the existence of, or encounter with, competing faiths and philosophies. They remain committed to a Christianity that they have inherited, which is usually deeply conservative. For the most part, they continue the patterns of elevating their own faith, oppressing other faiths, oppressing the marginalized and even the earth through an uncritical implementation of the demands of traditional Christian universality.

Many centauric level Christians choose to leave the church. Part of the difficulty may be attributed to some of the preliminary consequences of an acceptance of relativism. Relativism is an affirmation that a multitude of mutually conditioning factors, physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, sociological and cultural, affects every

belief, every assertion or every act of faith. This understanding of relativism can in fact be deeply liberating. It can free the Christian *from* a quest for absolute certainty and *for* a more “imaginative search for insight and understanding” (Cobb 1999:97). Furthermore, it can be a powerful means of confronting cultural and religious imperialism that seeks to promote only its own superiority. Since the church is so often the champion of Christian religious imperialism, the centaur may feel compelled to confront this bigotry, or to simply leave in protest.

There is, though, another side to relativism. Instead of it functioning as a tool to confront arrogance, it leads to a position in which one feels the inability to ever justify one’s beliefs and convictions, since those who oppose these are all equally right or equally wrong. Different perspectives are now no longer seen as mutually complementary positions that help one towards a deeper appreciation of reality. All dialogue and thus everything vaguely religious is, ultimately, viewed as little more than mere solipsistic nattering<sup>100</sup>. How can one be an effective agent of change when even the fundamentalists are as right or as wrong as oneself? If the position of closed-minded Christian bigotry is no worse than any other, leaving the church would certainly seem appealing.

Other centauric Christians choose to form small communities based either within or outside official church structures, made up of professing Christians, atheists, and people of other faiths, or no official faith at all. These groups form for a variety of reasons. These include the desire to deepen their spiritual practices through exploring various meditative techniques from different religious traditions. Alternatively, they may engage in psychotherapeutic activities – gestalt, Jungian or transpersonal. They may also engage in various ways of addressing issues of urgent political, social or ecological concern<sup>101</sup>.

In fact, one sign that gives clear witness to that fact that one has truly matured into the centauric level is having overcome the trap of extreme relativism, not just theoretically, but in one's daily life. The act of joining a community such as those described above is one way of actualising the firm conviction that it is not only possible but of the utmost importance to overcome the more debilitating effects of relativism. Christians together with Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and others can indeed call forth and exercise a deep commitment to the creative possibilities of making a decisive difference in a suffering world, possibilities that are legion and encouraged in the scriptures, traditions and the lives of the saints of the various faiths. The centaur-level dialogian refuses to allow evil to have sway in the world, to continue to exploit the poor and the earth. Christians have truth about God, about human nature and about the world, and these truths are offered in dialogue for mutual discussion and mutual action. Thus, within a dialogical community consisting of Christians and Buddhists, it might be that Christians realize that Buddhism in countries such as China, Korea and Japan has had little impact on the social and political lives of their countries, having developed little social analysis or political ethics (Cobb 1999:155). From an integral Christian perspective, Buddhism can be commended for having analysed the path to enlightenment in great detail focussing on a state of personal being (UL) that is beyond good and evil. However, attention can be drawn to the fact that historically it has paid less attention to issues of social justice (LL), so central to the Christian faith. This is in spite of the fact that some of the earliest impulses in Buddhism were concerned with intolerable social conditions. Various arguments can be forwarded to bolster the claim that Buddhism as a faith has previously encouraged issues of social welfare. In his tract *Buddhism and social action* Ken Jones (1981:2) writes that it is evident from the Buddha's discourses in the

*Dīgha Nikāya*, that he wanted to create social conditions favourable to the “individual cultivation of Buddhist values” or enlightenment. Furthermore, Walpola Rahula (in Jones 1981:2) argues that Buddhism arose as a fundamental critique of the Indian caste system. In addition, one of the key teachings of Buddhism, namely, the eight-fold path, the precept encouraging Right Conduct precedes the precept of Right Meditation, which provides a powerful scriptural foundation for committed social action, inspiring the Buddhist emperor Asoka (274-236 B.C.E.) to create a welfare state.

Unfortunately, it may be said without fear of exaggeration that over the vast majority of Buddhist history, social issues have lagged far behind the emphasis on personal enlightenment. An analysis of the reason Jones gives for the creation of acceptable “social conditions” shows that these conditions are sought not in and for themselves as being important for the community, but are sought primarily for the cultivation of the individual’s enlightenment. In Wilber’s terms, the UL Quadrant, or interior of the individual has largely taken precedence over the LL and LR, or the cultural and social realms of human life.

Nevertheless, it is precisely in its contact with a faith such as Judaism, Islam, Christianity and certain of the primal, indigenous religions, all of which show a marked emphasis on social action, that Buddhism can critically reflect on its own practice and make the necessary shifts to compensate for past reductionisms towards the UL Quadrant. This process of systematically balancing the four realms does not detract from the aims of enlightenment, but enhances them, especially given the aims of the Bodhisattvic ideal, which is to bestow compassion on all sentient beings who are lost in the mists of *samsara*.

We conclude this section by referring to a few authors on the subject of the relation between mystics and society. Robert Wuthnow's (in Wilber 1983a:107) article, *Political aspects of the quietistic revival*, challenges the well established prejudice that refuses to see any positive relation between mysticism and political commitment. He has found that the more mystical the person's spiritual engagement, the more likely the person is to be involved in social upliftment issues and political activity. Thomas Merton (in Leech 1994:183-184) may be cited as a person whose deepening spirituality led to a growing awareness of social and political issues, and "dates his concern with social and political matters to the years he spent as spiritual guide to the student monks." Merton's view of the monk was precisely as the one that stood in critical opposition to the fundamental values of society. "The great problem for monasticism today is not survival but prophecy... In reality the monk abandons the world only in order to listen more intently to the deepest and most neglected voices that proceed from its inner depth."

The deeper the person's internal spiritual development, the less narcissistic she becomes, and the greater her concern for those in the world. In the transpersonal realms, the world and self are seen as not-two, thus the other is in effect part of the deepest part of self. This is not the same as childish, narcissistic indissociation (the "world is my oyster"). It is the surface similarities between the prepersonal and transpersonal levels that so often lead to pre/trans fallacies. On the contrary, the mystic is motivated not by ego-inflation, but by compassion and selfless love, the bodhisattvic ideal of refusing nirvana for self until the entire sentient world is taken up out of samsara. Meditation is a deeply critical and confrontational political activity,<sup>102</sup> never a narcissistic withdrawal from the world.

The sociological structures of the world's religions today range between the mythic-rational and rational, with small enclaves of people congregating in centauric level and beyond groups. Thus, mostly, those individuals who have transcended into the transpersonal are required to act as prophetic voices in their religious communities and in the world, in order to be a living reminder of the promise of what is yet to come, and is here in the now already, if only people would wake up and behold.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

Our journey that has traced the development of the Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue has been a fascinating and fruitful one. Much, though, has been left unsaid, indeed, may never adequately be dealt with. Our conclusion, nevertheless, attempts first to summarise what has already been said. Second, it tries to probe into something of that which has remained unsaid, lying dormant between the lines, as it were. Some of these issues may yet prove to be important for the purpose of taking this work beyond its academic audience so that it might be useful to the actual task of dialogue.

### 6.1 What has gone before?

Ken Wilber (2000:221ff.) insists that it is not *what* the person says that determines the truth of a spiritual statement, but the *level* from which they say it.

*“All things are One”*

Anyone can say the words. However, spiritual realities are not merely objective statements, they also refer to subjective, interior facts. When the person has realized the level of interiority from which this statement derives, that is, the subtle, causal and nondual levels, then the words have a depth of meaning and truthfulness that cannot



otherwise be achieved. A person with a centauric level realization, for example, will interpret this statement to mean something like the oneness achieved in systems theory. But, with the higher level realizations, she will mean all gross and subtle levels of development, all the interior, exterior, individual and communal realms, all are involved in a unified process of involution and evolution not only through time, but in the arising of this very moment.

In a very real way, this short paragraph succinctly summarises so much of what we have been trying to say in this paper. It is not *what* the Christian says in response to the problem of interfaith dialogue, but their response-*ability* that determines the significance of the response. When a Christian takes seriously her responsibility with regard to interfaith dialogue, her theological response is intimately connected to the level of spiritual awakening she has achieved/been offered through God's grace. This, in turn, gives rise to the hermeneutical stance she is capable of utilizing. Even though she may choose to operate out of an interpretive framework that belongs to a lower level, she has access to as high a level as has arisen in her consciousness. The structure of the church or spiritual group with which she chooses to associate herself and fellowship in will reflect something of that development, although she may choose to fellowship in either a lower or, extremely rarely, a higher level community or organization.

The level from which the Christian exercises her responsibility in matters of interfaith dialogue is not pre-given. She exists not as a singular entity in a monolithic world with only one way of organizing reality, but in a multiple world with an infinity of interpretations. Different worldviews exist that help to categorize, represent and organise the way she chooses to approach those dialogical responsibilities.

Nevertheless, worldviews, while being infinite, are not merely arbitrary. There are

universals in language, affective qualities and morals, for example, which grow through at least twelve recognizable and discreet stages; sensorimotor, archaic, magic, mythic, rational, existential/centauric, psychic, subtle, causal and nondual.

We have asserted and shown how the Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue grows through these levels, and have concentrated specifically on the mythic rational, rational and existential/centauric levels.

No level of dialogue is necessarily better than any other one. Each level is perfectly adequate in its place and for its time. Nevertheless, each higher stage renders a more complete, a more adequate approach to dialogue than its predecessors do precisely because it includes but transcends them. The responsibility for dialogue does not lessen, but grows. The Christian dialogian has been offered a sacred trust that simply cannot be ignored or dismissed, for

[we are] servants of Christ and [are] entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful, [for Christ] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. (1 Corinthians 4:1-2+5b).

What are these levels of dialogical responsibility, then?

The mythic worldview (LL) sees the world as being filled with gods or an anthropocentrically conceived Mother/Father God, not so much as an abstract symbol of the ineffable but as a reality that affects life directly. Spirituality (UL) is defined in large part by the norms and values of the faith community. Self-identity is equated with one's role in that community. The community's structural form is for the most part held together (LR) with strongly vertical, top-down power structures. Interfaith dialogue is non-existent in any meaningful sense of the term. With the rise of the rational worldview, the intervening stage of mythic rationalism sees the attempt to

justify and propagate the mythological worldview with the tools of rationality. Interfaith dialogue becomes a launching pad for subsequent conversion, a means of learning the best ways to convert the other to Christianity. The theological response (UR) to the challenges of interfaith dialogue tends towards a tightening of their defences against what is correctly perceived to be a threat to their faith. The mythic rationalist's theology is based largely upon unexamined feelings of its own correctness based on the norms of their faith community, or, alternatively, based on a rational defence of those theological premises. Thus, the spirituality, morality and truth claims of the other faiths are perceived of as massively disturbing since they are explicitly felt to be a threat to the hegemony of the Christian faith community. This leads to not only a theology defined by militaristic language and oppositionalism directed towards other faiths, but an active rejection of contemporary Christian hermeneutics as a weapon to protect the infallibility of their scriptures, which, through their reading of it, justifies the drive towards unremitting conversion of a heathen world.

*Arrogance* is never, never far beneath the surface, on this particular level.

The rational worldview<sup>103</sup> (LL) is defined by a marked split in the subjective and objective realms. God is largely conceived of as being separate and perhaps distant from perceived reality. Understanding and relating the ways of how God might be viewed as overcoming this split is a major problem for the level, hence a preoccupation with the Christological problems of Incarnation, Presence, Trinity and other systematic theological problems. In terms of a theological response (UR) to interfaith dialogue, the major problem is to understand God's particular revelation of Godself in Christ in Christian scriptures, doctrine and history, and the realization that

all doctrines, revelations and histories are partial. This problem of historicity means that the revelations and truths in other religions, while admittedly also being partial, do contain valid insights and truths in spite of Christianity having traditionally denied this as at all possible. Responsibility is taken for one's own spirituality (UL) within a meaning framework conscious of its own boundaries. No longer is religious self-identity dependent on meaningful others in the faith community, but is now carved out for oneself based on personal convictions that make coherent sense within an explicit set of conceptual meanings. The structure of one's chosen faith community (LR) is probably less hierarchical and more egalitarian in its power relations. Interfaith dialogue shows a vast improvement on the mythic level's repudiation of any truth in the faith of the other. Truth in other faiths is acknowledged and even celebrated, but always viewed through its own rational, historical framework that sees itself as somehow superior to what the religions themselves might say. The new found openness to other faiths soon shows itself to be somewhat shallow, a "conquest through embrace", for example, when Hinduism sees Christianity as the spoor of a lesser animal inside the spoor of the Hindu elephant, or the Buddhist is celebrated as an "anonymous Christian".

*Pride* is a characteristic feature on this level.

The centauric worldview (LL) realises that multiple perspectives are integral to all perceived reality. Individuals are required, however, to move beyond the temptation to become lost in the infinity of possibilities, which renders any meaningful qualitative judgements incoherent. The person often comes to a new appreciation for the power of the symbols of her own faith whilst simultaneously being opened to creative and new possibilities in dialogue for finding Truth, meaning and

transcendence. We saw that the spirituality or faith (UL) of the centaur was a “dialectical knowing” where the known and the unknown in the multiplex world and beyond are invited to speak in its own language in order to disclose itself, regardless of the impact of that word on the hearer’s self esteem. It acknowledges its powerlessness to control the world and God within carefully constructed systems. The person’s theology of dialogue (UR) is often misunderstood in one’s original faith community, many of whom do not have the requisite inner depth to fully appreciate the approach. The theology is inter alia described as “conditionalist”, dynamic interplay of interdependent, mutually conditioning forces and relations which holistically embraces multiple worldviews, feelings, knowledge, thought processes and insights. This “radical relationality” finds a balance of mutuality between plurality and coherence that steers clear of the imperialism of the dominating One, and the cancer of the dominating Many, or “pure chaos”. Religious meaning does emerge in the plurality of specific events, the infinite creativity of surface structures. It also coheres, however, in expanding circles that merge with wider fields of same level events following the stable patterns of discreet, cross cultural deep structures. While any one theology of dialogue is absolutely unique in its unrepeatability and originality, the conditionalist approach is aware of the human need to identify, collate and define specific aspects of the dynamic flux of the world. However, instead of the rational level’s carefully crafted abstractions that separate their own system or religion from others, and instead of its requirement that belief and faith be suspended in order to appreciate other theologies, the centauric or conditionalist approach embraces life as an ever-changing flux with no fixed centre. It is a theology that finds itself comfortable “along edges”, precisely because it is rooted in the stability that comes from having developed through the crucial stages of mythic rationality and rationality,

which are taken up, embraced and transcended in the centauric level. There is at last the middle way into a creatively new place of mutual respect and harmony. The centaur, furthermore, has become acutely aware of the injustices that plague humanity and the earth, against which the poor, the religions and all the “unimportant” people seem so powerless. However, she is determined to make a difference, and generates around her communities that excludes none, that includes the true *oikoumene* – all sentient beings and the earth itself.

*Humility/universalising* might be used to define this level.

## 6.2 Between the lines: what has not been said?

Of the many issues and questions that have arisen as a result of the aims of this thesis and have been deferred, there are at least three that are, I believe, particularly important. The first has to do with the higher stages of interfaith dialogue not yet covered. What would the deep structures be of the Christian responsibility towards dialogue at the psychic, subtle and causal levels? The second issue deals with hesitations about Ken Wilber’s integral perspective that may be a concern for Christians familiar with more traditional systematic theological structures. Wilber’s is, after all, an idealistic framework informed largely by Vedanta and Buddhism, and not one based on specifically Christian categories. The third is the question about the relative advantages of approaching the question of the Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue from an AQAL perspective.

We end with a look at a way in which we might possibly recast the entire thesis in a way that makes it more accessible to those less interested in pouring over reams of research information.

### 6.2.1 *Quo vadis* - Where to next?

We have not spent much time on the higher reaches of the Christian responsibility towards interfaith dialogue since very little of that level of dialogue has been reached by Christians generally.<sup>104</sup> I can only speculate about the shape of the Christian responsibilities at these levels since I have not had any experience of dialogue in these further reaches. Nevertheless, the exercise, while brief, might be informative.

We know that the level that follows on from the centauric is the psychic, where classically there is the experience of cosmic consciousness, or a oneness with the whole realm of form. Wilber (2000:146ff) often refers to this realm the path of the shaman or yogis, with their sense of the awesomeness and grandeur of the universe along with their own insignificance in the grand scheme of things. Typical on this realm are experiences such as *kundalini*, waves of energy from the emotional-sexual body that come into the awareness on the psychic level. In Christianity, this is the realm of the spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, healing through the laying on of hands, words of wisdom and prophecies.

Dialogue on this level includes all the gains made on the previous levels as we have discussed, but would add to these a sharing of these gifts and experiences. Dialogue might typically include a sharing of meditative and prayer practices in order to deepen the appreciation of the oneness of self with nature. It might typically include the sharing of Christian healing, prophecy and words of encouragement together with, say, Hindu *shakti pat* and *kundalini*.

The characteristic tone of dialogue would be a *reverential* awe for God while perceived as other and inhering in nature, but moving into *power* and *empowerment* as it is realized that the “sacred force [is] an internal current of one’s own bodymind” (Wilber 2000:147).

The next level, as we know, is the subtle, or the “path of saints”. Here, the gross realm is left behind. Mystical experiences tend to centre not on nature, but on the form of deity or deities of the religion. In Christian terms, this is a profound experience of the presence of Christ as fully God. The tone of this level tends to be ecstatic and visionary, even apocalyptic. I am not sure what form, if any, interfaith dialogue would take at this level.

Even less certain is the form of dialogue at the next higher level, the causal. To speak of form in any sense now seems out of place, since this is the home of the unborn Witness, the very ground of all form. It is the abode of formlessness, pure cessation, the Godhead beyond God, and while the subtle saw the *union* of the soul with God, the causal sees the *identity* of soul and that which is pure Mystery, unidentifiable, and beyond categorisation entirely. Here, there is a vastness, a liberation, a freedom, or a pure emptiness in which all that is arises simply as it is. It is not an *experience* of emptiness; it is the ground in which all experiences arise. Thus, in this place, interfaith dialogue in all its forms arises, and is good and true and beautiful, exactly the way it is and ought to be.

It is the responsibility of every Christian to allow the work of sanctification to so progress in their own life that it comes to rest in the causal realm, where Christ is all in all,<sup>105</sup> thus ensuring that the multivalent ability to engage in dialogue is completely available to them in every sense.



### 6.2.2 But is it Christian?

We return to a question we asked at the end of chapter 2. Having dealt with the hermeneutical question surrounding the issue of mystical experiences, we asked whether a hermeneutical framework, that is fundamentally informed by Buddhist and not specifically Christian thought patterns, can be used as a basis for addressing the specifically *Christian* problem of the growth of its own responsibility towards interfaith dialogue.

This concern is augmented by the difficulties that arise because of the way Wilber takes completely divergent individuals up into his system without considering that the teachings of any one of those people might well have utterly negated his system. The issue of whether the uniqueness of the cross of Christ might be harmonised with Wilber's system or whether it is a stumbling block to it is a burning issue for Christians. In a similar vein (that is, on the issue of uniqueness), Wilber (2000:103) equates the Buddha, Christ, Lao Tzu and Krishna as those who have achieved a causal-level identity with Spirit. This does seem to me to not give enough room for very real differences that might occur between the teachings and life of these great founders, differences that are truly incompatible, differences that we are called to learn to live with as opposed to too quickly harmonising them. Many Christians may also find difficulty with Wilber as a person, since he seems to suggest that whilst he has access to the nondual One Taste, Jesus was on a slightly lower level of development, namely the causal (see Wilber 2000:103). Could not the charge of arrogance be laid against Ken Wilber, even if it is an unwitting self-elevation?

As important as these issues are, I wish right now to explore whether it is legitimate to use a Buddhist-philosophical hermeneutics to work out a Christian theology of dialogue.

The very earliest Christians' experience of God was as Father, or more precisely Abba. These were undoubtedly modelled on the pattern of Jesus' own Abba experience. Moreover, and quite incredibly, Jesus' dying and abandonment on the cross by Abba in no way negated this experience. Rather, the effect of the cross was to bring about a profound shift in the consciousness of the Christ-followers. Instead of expecting God to save them from a life of adversity and suffering, the result of an anguished concern with a life of self-centredness, they were moved into the mystic realm of understanding where worry over the self was transformed into a living for others. The result was a community in which the self of its members had been undone by the life of Christ, for the sake of Christ and the community of Christians.

This particular experience of Jesus was not necessarily understood in a clearly articulated fashion. Keenan (1989:45) reminds us that these early Christians were neither religious professionals nor educated philosophers. But as the faith came to be adopted by a greater number of people educated and nurtured in Greek rhetoric and philosophy, the need to verbalize and make sense of their experience became more urgent, and they did so within the patterns of their worldview. The conversion of Justin Martyr illustrates the point: having cut his philosophical teeth on a Stoic and Pythagorean foundation, he came to embrace the Platonic cosmology which traces the super-abundance and overflowing of the One through a creator God, the world of Archetypal Forms into the human mind (*nous*), through living creatures (body) and into matter. On meeting an old man who, as a Christian, exposed the inadequacies of such thinking without the crucial roles played by Christ in the scheme, Justin Martyr

came to the realization that the Christian faith “alone seemed safe and profitable [and] for this reason am I a philosopher” (in Keenan 1989:46).

The development by Christians of a philosophical understanding with which to articulate and relate the various elements of their faith experience was, therefore, a quite natural phenomenon, and not something artificially forced upon the faith. It was perfectly natural, for example, for religious thinkers to use Greek models, given the fact that the early biblical writers had not developed a consistent and technical set of terms. Both Philo of Alexandria and the author of the letter to the Colossians used certain themes from Platonic and Stoic sources quite extensively.

The church's move out of its initial Judaic cultural context into a Hellenistic-Roman one again saw quite profound changes in theological expression, liturgy, the sacraments and organizational structures. This pattern repeated itself whenever Christianity found itself in changed cultural and historical contexts. Its new converts would propose a new understanding of the Gospel and Christian tradition, often in spite of strong missiological pressure for the converted to adopt the prevailing Christian cultural forms, since they often came to be seen, quite incorrectly, as part and parcel of the central message of the Gospel itself.

As with every context in which Christians find themselves, today's postmodern realities demand a hermeneutics that offers a concise, clear, even innovative means of interpreting the message of Christ in a world in which Christianity is only one of many possible faiths from which to choose. It is no longer seen as a priori the “right” religion by a fast growing number of people. Of course, this is not to say that most people willingly accept this position. The vast majority of humanity still exists under the yoke of mythic-rational religious structures. They advocate a thoroughly imperialistic approach to other faiths and ideologies. Love, compassion and tolerance

are extended to only those people who consciously adopt its own paradigms, ritual and belief structures. All those outside of this are variously branded heretics, infidels, the lost, the worldly, the unenlightened and as such condemned to a life of ignorance, *avidya*, damnation or whatever. Whenever this mythically bound level of Christianity is taken as the norm for all forms of Christianity, can it be any wonder that doubts are raised about the possibilities of the “inner logic of Christianity”<sup>106</sup> being able to lend itself to the sorts of theological, cultural, spiritual and sociological changes demanded of it in today’s world contexts? We know, however, that this is not the only form of Christianity available for dialogue. “The test,” John Cobb (1999:72) points out,

is whether one can integrate the wisdom of alien traditions into one’s Christian vision. This is not easy and there is no simple recipe. St. Augustine’s Neo-Platonic Christianity was a major intellectual achievement that required personal genius and disciplined work. To do equally well today in relationship to Hindu and Buddhist wisdom will take equal daring and sustained effort. My point is not that it is easy. It is only that it is faithful to Christ and preceded in our history... I am convinced that it is a task whose time has come and that Christian faith offers us unique motivation and unique resources for that task.

It is, then, in obedience to the command of Jesus to trust and allow the Spirit to blow where it will that sets the Christian free to use a hermeneutical framework that does not purport to be Christian in order to understand Christianity more intimately, especially with regard to its relation to the other faiths. The very desire to have one’s life undone through a shift in consciousness inspired by the cross of Jesus allows and encourages the formation of a spirituality and a theology that takes seriously all faiths, and not just the Christian faith. It requires courage to realize that Jesus does not save one from a life of suffering, a life that avowedly avoids the invitation to let go the old Adam. Openness to new ways of appropriating and experiencing Jesus’ incarnation, his Abba’s presence, his death and abandonment on the cross and resurrection all

bring for the Christian that shift in consciousness from anguished self-centredness into the transpersonal realms of understanding, where concern for self is transformed into a life dedicated to the salvation of all sentient beings.

At the same time, the Christian's identity no longer excludes the Buddha as the Enlightened one for her, or Mohammed as the True Prophet of God for her. To confirm these religious founders as part of one's own religious identity is not to deny Christ as only Lord and Saviour, for each affirmation is not, by definition, a denial of the others. For the Christian, Jesus is always central. That is the meaning of being called by that Name. Yet, the Christian faith is not destroyed because the Buddha is enlightened. On the contrary, the Christian is deeply grateful to the Buddha for more clearly showing the deep meaning of enlightenment, for showing how to practically be aware of Christ's presence moment by moment. The Christian is deeply grateful to Mohammed who shows in a new and previously inconceivable way what it means to truly submit to God, which is the very meaning of the word *Islam*. Interfaith dialogue at the centauric and transpersonal levels deepens one's own specific faith holistically; it does not destroy one's faith overwhelmingly<sup>107</sup> or dilute it syncretistically<sup>108</sup>.

Using Ken Wilber's hermeneutics as a basis for understanding Christian themes is arguably not un-Christian at all. It follows the tradition of using philosophical frameworks that are common to particular times and cultures for the casting of pressing theological concerns and themes. In our case, the framework takes seriously the insights and wisdom traditions of the world's faiths that simply cannot be ignored in our times and especially the Western culture. It has the additional benefit of honouring and taking seriously the neo-platonic tradition, which many early Christian theologians used, including the great Augustine. I think the onus lies not on those who

wish to use Wilber, but on his detractors to show how his work might be unsuitable for Christian theological use.

### 6.2.3 Why the AQAL approach?

Very briefly, let us look at the immediate benefits of Wilber's AQAL approach for understanding the growth of the Christian responsibility for dialogue.

Interfaith dialogue comes to be understood holistically. It is not an isolated event in the life of the Christian, but something that impacts on every aspect of her life; her spirituality, her theology, her interpretation of her own and the other's religion, and on the type of Christian community she chooses to associate with.

In Quadrant terms, beginning with the Upper Left or interior, personal dimension or spirituality of a Christian dialogian, Wilber's approach can act as a guide for revealing precisely where one's own spiritual development lies. One begins to understand that the current state of one's spiritual life is not static. One is able to see from whence one has come and where to from here. There is a path and guide for the spiritual journey towards fullness in Christ. This provides a sense of containment in that one need not fear the loss of one's self identity at any one particular level, since this loss means the gain of a wider, more inclusive identity, until such time as the "bottom of the pail breaks through"<sup>109</sup>, and it is "no longer I who lives, but Christ in me".<sup>110</sup>

In terms of the Upper Right Quadrant, one is able to assess the level of one's own Christian theological response to the issues brought up by dialogue. More than that, one can determine the level of one's dialogical partner's theological response. Thus, instead of being nonplussed or alternatively angered by the other's response, one is able to determine the level and respond appropriately to that level. In Buddhist terms,

this is called *upaya*,<sup>111</sup> or responding to the person at the level of their understanding. It is the attempt to be both relevant to their level, but also edge them towards a deeper understanding of the issues, while not expecting them to be fully cognisant of the deeper levels. Of course, this is not to say that perhaps one's dialogical partner might not be responding from a level deeper than one's own! This is why having an overall, integrated template of responses is so deeply helpful for determining the level of response and preventing the pre/trans fallacy.

In terms of the Lower Left Quadrant, or the interior of one's religious community, one is able to speak of other faiths to one's own community, or other communities within Christianity at the appropriate level. It is not helpful, indeed quite conceivably retrogressive, to speak to a mythic rational Christian about the merits of the Buddhist concept of emptiness, or the value of Hindu forms of worship. It would be far more beneficial to that community to recast the message (it is by no means certain that this is always possible) of Buddhist emptiness in explicitly Christian terms, for example, kenosis. The point is that Wilber's scheme offers one the opportunity and space in which to make those sorts of judgement calls within one's community that might not otherwise exist.

In terms of the Lower Right, or socio-structural dynamics of one's religious community, one is now in a far better position to be at peace within a highly variegated community, developmentally speaking. One holds in tension the fact that not everyone operates at the same level, yet all Christians still remain part of the Kingdom of God, if not the church structures. On the centauric level, one is no longer so much concerned about membership to a recognisable socio-religious structure, for one has come to understand the oikoumene is ever deeper, more inclusive ways. Thus,

one comes to see oneself as both centrally Christian, but also to some extent a Jew, or Buddhist, or Hindu.

Wilber's scheme offers a way, then, of holding all of these intricate facets of the Christian responsibility towards dialogue in an interrelated, overarching, yet non-restrictive whole. We are not suggesting that Wilber's is the only approach from which to examine this topic, yet it is one that deserves an honest and careful consideration.

#### 6.2.4. Re-visioning this thesis' structure

In an attempt to remain faithful to this section's desire to "say what has not been said", I wish to say that were I required to explain the contents of this thesis to a wider audience, I would want to incorporate a simplification of Wilber's various levels of development (not the Quadrants). This simplification comes from the fledgling science of "spiral dynamics" in which Don Beck (2000)<sup>112</sup> makes the process of visualizing and understanding Ken Wilber's levels of development in the Lower Left Quadrant significantly easier. We can do no more than briefly outline spiral dynamics, which is Beck's adaptation of the work of Clare W. Graves of Union College, New York.

Graves proposed that the psychology of the mature human being is an "unfolding, emergent, oscillating and spiralling process" that is marked by progressive transcendence of older, lower- order behaviour systems into newer, higher-order systems. Beck takes Graves' work further by both acknowledging and utilising Wilber's AQAL approach. He systematically collates and presents the emerging



worldviews of the various levels in a way that show that the older systems do not disappear. They remain present in a way that both adds texture to the more complex levels and allows them to remain available if they are required in times of deep stress or emergency. Each worldview remains as a system within us that is designed to cope with the different problems of existence.

<b>Don Beck's systematisation of worldviews that arise holarchically i.e. each level transcends and <i>includes</i> the lower</b>	
<b>Colour</b>	<b>typical worldview</b>
<b>beige</b>	A natural milieu where humans rely on instincts to stay alive
<b>Purple</b>	A magical place alive with spirit beings and mystical signs
<b>red</b>	A jungle where the strongest and most cunning survive
<b>blue</b>	an ordered existence under the control of the ultimate truth
<b>Orange</b>	A market place full of possibilities and opportunities
<b>green</b>	A human habitat in which we share life's experiences
<b>Yellow</b>	A chaotic organism forged by differences and change
<b>Turquoise</b>	an elegantly balanced system of interlocking-forces

Beck notes that each level of worldview has its own inherent value system that is invariant, much like the natural results of genetic material. He calls this a “valuesMEME”, a coding mechanism that inculcates every aspect of society. In essence, a meme is the cultural equivalent of a physical gene. Just as a particular gene causes blue eyes and not brown eyes in the physical body, so a particular meme results in the worship of a cow as opposed to eating a cow in a particular culture. vMEMES refer more specifically to the value system of the various, distinctly recognisable worldviews that arise across cultures. Beck presents nine distinct vMEMES, although Wilber, as we have seen, would say there were at least seventeen. The point is simply that all of the previously awakened systems still exist within a

highly developed person or culture. These deep level “tectonic-like psychological plates” affect the surface levels and create tensions in the higher systems.

For our purposes, then, we would say along with Beck that every religion contains within itself different levels of spiritual and psycho-cultural emergence, as displayed within these evolutionary levels of complexity. Their sub-groupings have different centres of gravity. In Christianity, we have identified the mythic, mythic rational, rational and centauric levels of dialogue. These would correspond with Beck’s colour systems in the following way. The mythic level corresponds with red; the mythic rational level with blue; early rational (inclusivist approaches) correspond with orange, late rational (which are the early pluralist approaches) are green, and the centauric level matches both yellow (Fowler’s conjunctive stage) and turquoise (Fowler’s universalising stage). The previously awakened levels do not disappear, but stay active within the worldview piles, and will affect both the nature and form of the higher levels. Beck equates this with Russian dolls, there are systems within systems within systems.

How would Beck’s spiral dynamics impact on our AQAL approach to interfaith dialogue? In spite of what seems to be “information overload” in the concluding chapter of this thesis, I believe that Beck’s colour coding would help to explain in a more accessible way much of the information we have accrued with regard to the levels of Christian responsibility to interfaith dialogue. I shall present a simple diagram based on Beck’s work to illustrate.

Adaptation of Don Beck: Different worldviews or vMEMES engage in interfaith dialogue for different reasons.		
Colour	Dialogical level	Deepest motivation and "bottom line" justification for survival, or interfaith dialogue
Beige	Survival Clans*	To keep a place in the survival niche, as in the movie <i>The Quest for Fire</i>
Purple	Ethnic Tribes*	To protect the magical ancestral traditions, rights of kinship, and sacred places.
Red	Mythic (Feudal Empire)*	To dominate, gain the spoils, and earn the right to rape, pillage, and plunder. <i>Christian Crusades, Taliban Jihad</i>
Blue	Mythic rational - strongly hierarchical, pastor/pope	To protect own religious values, defend and preserve faith as "holy" cause. Dialogue is a means of more effective conversion.
Orange	Rational - "Corporate church," less hierarchical, e.g. mainline Protestant	To advance religious spheres of influence. Dialogue accesses "raw materials" of other faiths to advance the borders of one's own faith.
Green	Late rational/early centauric - Value Communities	Historical relativity means one's own faith cannot be said to be superior. Risk of being lost in flatland radical relativity.

\*Largely preChristian levels. No genuine interfaith dialogue is possible at these levels, just survival. These would engage in domination and destruction of other faiths, not in a dialogical relationship.

It is clear that once a new cultural level appears in a faith, it will spread its "instructional codes" and "life priority messages" throughout that religion's surface-level expressions: spirituality, theology, economic and political arrangements. As each level emerges, it does not lose that which has gone before, but integrates the lessons learned on that level while adding the new insights abilities that are only found in the next higher level. Beck's next diagram shows the type of thinking or the worldview that is appropriate to each level, and the cultural, LL manifestations that typically occur irrespective of where or when they arise in human history.

Don Beck: THE LIVING STRATA IN OUR PSYCHO-CULTURAL ARCHEOLOGY				
Stage/ Wave	Color Code	Name	Thinking	Cultural manifestations and personal displays
8	Turquoise	Early psychic/ Late centauric	Holistic	collective individualism; cosmic spirituality; earth changes
7	Yellow	Centauric	Ecological	natural systems; self-principle; multiple realities; knowledge
6	Green	Late rational	Consensus	egalitarian; feelings; authentic; sharing; caring; community
5	Orange	Early rational	Strategic	materialistic; consumerism; success; image; status; growth
4	Blue	Mythic rational	Authority	meaning; discipline; traditions; morality; rules; lives for later
3	Red	Mythic -PowerGods	Egocentric	gratification; glitz; conquest; action; impulsive; lives for now
2	Purple	Magic - KinSpirits	Animistic	rites; rituals; taboos; super- stitions; tribes; folk ways & lore
1	Beige	Archaic - SurvivalSense	Instinctive	food; water; procreation; warmth; protection; stays alive

Beck's system, then, is a fantastic aid to illustrating exactly why a developmental approach to our study is so helpful. We are not only able to ascertain the stage of our own religious worldview, but also that of our own religious community, and that of our dialogical partner's personal and communal religious life. One's own religion and faith, and that of one's dialogical partner, can now be seen as having been formed, among other things, by the emergence of value systems in the response to life conditions. These complex adaptations create the bonds in the faith community and defines who they are as a people, and why they have the faith they do. Each religio-cultural wave, like Russian dolls, has over time developed unique expressions of faith with survival and growth tactics, myths of origin, artistic forms, life styles, and sense of community.

Every faith is a legitimate expression of their experiences; but this does not imply that each has an equal capacity to deal with the complex problems in society in general, and with the problems of interfaith dialogue in particular. Each higher stage is more adequate. These stages are inevitable steps in terms of their deep structure, but not in

their surface form. Religions, because they develop, are not inflexible, having permanent traits. Instead, they ebb and flow, progress and regress, with the capacity to achieve new levels of complexity. For this reason, having a system in which to understand the broad trends within one's own and within other religions makes dialogue between the faiths so much easier.

Of course, it may well be that the developmental scheme we have argued for in this paper is either entirely or at least partly wrong. This, however, does not mean that the Christian *responsibility* for interfaith dialogue simply goes away. All Christians who acknowledge the importance of interfaith dialogue, and we now know that means Christians who hail from every walk of life and who represent every denomination still have the task of explaining precisely *why* and *how* their dialogical responsibility grows, deepens and matures.

## Endnotes to chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup> The word hermeneutics here is intended to mean our “theory of interpretation”. Concentrating on the hermeneutical question provides us with the space to take one step back from having to agree with the substance of the debate, or having to determine the truth or falsity of the enquiry. Within this space, we are invited to ask Troeltsch’s (in Pye 1973:9) important phenomenological questions: What kind of tools are taken for granted as being useful for the solution to this problem? Is the meaning and the goal of this enterprise really so simple and straightforward? What does the task involve, if indeed it is necessary and feasible at all? Chapter 2 of this thesis is to some extent my attempt to address these issues as they pertain to the usage of Wilber for analysing the development of Christian interfaith dialogue through the four quadrants and various levels or stages (i.e. All-Quadrant and All-Level development [AQAL]).
- <sup>2</sup> In private conversation
- <sup>3</sup> I do not attempt to redress the sexist language in the work of scholars quoted in this paper. This is because I assume that the vast majority worked and wrote during a time that was largely ignorant of the hurt caused by the mistaken assumption that the (white, heterosexual) male’s experience of the world sufficiently explained that of women, children, homosexuals, physically challenged people and others. Other sections of the thesis will refer to both “him” and “her,” or simply “her”.
- <sup>4</sup> From the poet Adrienne Rich’s phrase, “the dream of a common language” as quoted by Tom Driver (in Hick and Knitter 1987:205).
- <sup>5</sup> Gavin D’Costa (in D’Arcy May 1998:33) along with other theologians, whom we shall visit, promotes the idea of a balance between preserving difference, or Otherness, whilst simultaneously engaging with the Other in relationship.
- <sup>6</sup> See Ihab Hassan’s *The dismemberment of Orpheus: toward a postmodern literature* (1982:268).
- <sup>7</sup> A term I have chosen to describe those who are engaged in either informal or formal discussions with adherents of a faith different to their own, with the aim of better understanding those persons and their faiths within the context of their culture and the world.
- <sup>8</sup> The “I”, “We” and “It” represent the three broad areas or quadrants that we will be investigating when considering Wilber’s integral philosophical approach.
- <sup>9</sup> See Wesley Ariarajah’s (1998:7) paper *The impact of interreligious dialogue on the ecumenical movement*
- <sup>10</sup> Krüger deals extensively with the results of increased reflexivity in the study of religions. Background assumptions, left unexamined and unarticulated, may well lead to an undesirable “pseudo-innocence” as he defines it
- <sup>11</sup> The term “mysticism” is generally used to denote forms of awareness beyond the conventional state located in the egoic bodymind. Wilber refines these mystical experiences into his four transpersonal states of psychic, subtle, causal and nondual. Thus, which of these four stages the experience takes as its primary referent determines the mystical stage. For example, the psychic level as the location of the initial mystical experiences are closely bound to the body and feeling; kundalini, reliving birth trauma, nature mysticism or identification with plants, animals or Gaia, and preliminary meditative states. The subtle level mystical experiences have far fewer referents in the gross waking realm, but tend to include experiences of deities, luminosities, heavenly sounds, archetypal forms and patterns. In Hindu terms, this is having moved beyond the first five (bodily) chakras into the sixth chakra. Causal level mysticism has no referents at all except radical Emptiness, something like the One Taste experience described above, and within the Emptiness, whatever arises moment by moment is its referent i.e. nondual mysticism. Each stage of the evolution of these mystical states obeys the “logic of successive unfolding” (Wilber 1995:611), which means that each includes but transcends the former. We shall see that this is precisely the logic that pertains to the unfolding stages of interfaith dialogue.
- <sup>12</sup> Matthew Fox’s description of deep ecumenism has much to commend it. The problem with his understanding of deep ecumenism is not “syncretism, however, but the risk of committing the “trans-fallacy” that we will be examining in chapter two. Briefly, Fox tends to bestow on certain prepersonal aspects of the earth and certain prepersonal aspects of indigenous religions a transpersonal status. This may be because there are certain surface similarities between the prerational and transrational levels, the most obvious being that both are nonrational. Nevertheless, a primary indissociation with Mother (which is a normal part of child development) may appear

desirable because it undercuts the separation caused by the maturation process. This, however, is *not* the same as a mystical, psychic level union between the individual and Mother Nature. This union can only be achieved once the ego has separated from Mother, has left the Eden of childhood. To confuse the former state of indissociation with mystical union is to confuse and elevate the prepersonal into the transpersonal, and then recommend a regression into self-centred egotism as the salvation for the world. If Fox were to eliminate some of his more obvious trans-fallacies, his model of the "cosmic Christ" would have a more far-reaching, healing effect on the church.

- <sup>13</sup> As with most Third World emerging markets throughout the world, the ANC has adopted fiscal policies insisted upon by the World Bank, GATT, and the IMF that open markets to foreign investors. A major cause of the world's general economic crisis is the huge explosion of unregulated financial capital since the Bretton Woods system was dismantled, initiated by Richard Nixon, according to Professor Noam Chomsky (see [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Chomsky/Rollback\\_Part4\\_Chom.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Chomsky/Rollback_Part4_Chom.html)). He writes that in 1995, "Daily turnover on foreign exchange markets may be approaching \$1 trillion, some estimate. In the early 1970s, about 90% of capital in international exchanges was for investment and trade, 10% for speculation. By 1990, those figures had reversed, and a 1993 estimate is that only 5% is related to 'real economic transactions'" which seriously undermines a country's ability to protect its currency, hence its people, especially the very poor. Furthermore, the American Economics Association, Nobel laureate James Tobin "suggested that taxes be imposed to slow down speculative flows, which, if unimpeded, would drive the world towards a low-growth, low-wage economy, with booming profits as well. By now, the point is widely recognized; a commission headed by Paul Volcker, former chairman of the Federal Reserve, attributes about half of the 50% decline in growth rates since the early 1970s to the huge growth of currency speculation. The world is being moved by state-corporate policy towards a kind of Third world model, with sectors of great wealth, a huge mass of misery, and a large superfluous population, lacking any rights because they contribute nothing to profit-making for the rich... [with] ecological costs [being] imposed on future generations who do not "vote" in the market, and other "externalities" consigned to footnotes." The point of this extensive quote is to show that while the rich get richer at the expense of the poor, and while democracy is progressively being eroded through the aims and strategies of big business (the creation of personal wealth and power at any cost), interfaith dialogue cannot limit itself to issues that do not directly confront the evil it encounters in the world. This concern for the suffering is a key characteristic of dialogue at the centauric level, as we shall see.

- <sup>14</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche had little tolerance for the Enlightenment values of Reason, Morality, and Progress, and by proclaiming the "Death of God," sought to fill the void with a Dionysian dance of the Will to Power. This left open the door to a range of power mad individuals (Hitler, Mao, Stalin, Pol Pot, Amin) or races (American, Afrikaner, Israeli) to declare themselves lord of their self-defined domain. Although he deprived Western culture of a centre, he did so only by putting something else in its place viz. the idea of a Superman beyond good and evil. It would take the move into postmodernity for the centre to become fully deconstructed.

- <sup>15</sup> The postmodern condition is never far from our discussion of the various contexts in which the different levels of dialogue occur. This is because I generally assume it to form the cultural reality against which dialogue occurs in the contemporary world. We do not have the capacity to look at dialogue in more specific contexts, such as in rural India or Thailand, where the cultural background would be very different.

<sup>16</sup>

1. *Appamādo amatapadam –  
pamādo maccuno padam*  
*Appamattā na miyanti –  
Ye pamattā yathā matā.*
2. *Etam visesato ātāvū –  
Appamādamhi paṇḍitā*  
*Appamāde pamodanti –  
Ariyānam gocore ratā.*
3. *Te jhāyino sātthikā –  
niccam daṭṭaparakkamā*  
*Phusanti dhīrā nibbānam –  
Yogakkhemam anuttaram.*

- This might be translated as:
1. "Heedfulness is the path to the deathless, heedlessness is the path to death. The heedful do not die; the heedless are like the dead.
  2. Distinctly understanding this (difference), the wise (intent) on heedfulness rejoice in heedfulness, delighting in the realm of the *ariyas*.
  3. The constantly meditative, the ever-steadfast ones realize the bond-free, supreme *Nibbāna*."
- Heedfulness (*appamāda*) might also be translated "ever-present mindfulness" or "awareness" which comes about through concentration (*samatha*) and contemplation, or insight (*vipassanā*). This leads to a state of being free from the bonds of sense-desire (*kāma*), false views (*dīṭṭhi*) and ignorance (*avijjā*), which is otherwise known as *Nibbāna*, literally a "departure from craving" (see the Appamāda Vagga discourse in the *Dhammapada* by Narada Thera 1993:23-25). I cannot claim to have achieved this state for anything more than a few seconds at any one time, if at all.
- Nevertheless, the monastic environment does offer a particularly valuable space for one to practice something approaching this heedful awareness for both beginners and more advanced practitioners.
- <sup>17</sup> In his book *A sociable God* (1983a, see also *Sex, ecology, spirituality* 1995:596) Wilber distinguishes between the *legitimacy* and *authenticity* of a religion's spiritual engagements. A religion is legitimate to the extent it allows and facilitates translation. Translation is the arranging or organizing of the self-system on one particular level of development. A faith is transformative when the faith encourages (usually through a intense spiritual crisis – what Jesus may have meant by "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" in Mt 10:34b) the shift from one level to the next. "Mythic religions," he says, "often demonstrated a very high degree of legitimacy...but were not very profound on the authenticity scale. Reason is more authentic than myth, but often faces its own intense legitimization crises, especially when confined in the borders of nations. The transpersonal domain is, in turn, more authentic than reason, and usually faces even more difficult legitimization."
- <sup>18</sup> He does so without reference. See Alan Race's *Christian and religious pluralism: patterns in Christian theology of religions* (1983).
- <sup>19</sup> "These facts reveal a holocaust of ineffable proportions," remarks Matthew Fox (1988:25), who in direct contrast to Lutzer, views this crime of institutional Christianity as every bit, if not more, serious as the Nazi-led Holocaust. "What happened at Auschwitz was heralded, and indeed surpassed, on American soil four centuries earlier."
- <sup>20</sup> The stated "*Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*" of the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions was the first time in the history of religions in which a basic consensus was reached on binding values, irrevocable standards and fundamental moral attitudes which could be affirmed by all religions in spite of dogmatic differences, and which could be supported even by non-believers. This in no way implied that the differences in the unique moral teachings within the various faiths became redundant. Rather, the global ethic is something of a minimum requirement, or an external perspective, which is common to all faiths – indeed – all human beings. A common and binding ethic is a long way from the desire to unite "Christ with the world religions." When viewed internally, as it were, one's own particular faith might well be taken as the one, true religion. Yet, this does not exclude the fact that truth exists in other faiths too, or that others might well legitimately conceive of their faith as the "one, true religion." This "unity in difference", or "coincidence of paradoxes" is a function of a higher, more integrated perspective that Lutzer seems not yet to have achieved (though "achieved" is not yet the right meaning of "transcendence.") Lutzer, by straining this higher, more integrated perspective through his own, tends to see it as a disastrous syncretism that ought to be wiped out with all expediency, and Holy and righteous, religious fury.
- <sup>21</sup> See John Welwood's "On spiritual authority" in Dick Anthony's (1987) *Spiritual Choices: the problems of recognizing authentic paths to inner transformation*, especially the section entitled "Characteristics of spiritual group pathology", 285-290.
- <sup>22</sup> See Steven Covey (1989:204 ff.) especially his first of three principles in a paradigm of interdependence, which is his fourth Habit of "highly effective people": To think "win/win" as opposed to "win/lose."
- <sup>23</sup> The author quite correctly exposes what he calls "new Age attempts" to remake Christ in their own image by proposing the discovery of "hidden writings" that confirm Jesus' journey to Egypt or Tibet or India, depending on the strain of wisdom teachings most preferred. These attempts show an unwillingness on the part of adherents of other faiths to take seriously what Christians take to be their orthodox canon, and give peripheral writings pride of place simply because they affirm tenets of their own doctrines. This is particularly true, for example, of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's *The*



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*mustard seed: a living explanation of the sayings of Jesus from the gospel according to Thomas* (1975).

<sup>24</sup> “But the crisis which broke on all human order in the man Jesus is more radical and comprehensive than may be gathered from all these individual indications... [A]ll true and serious belief in progress presupposes that there is a certain compatibility between the new and the old, and that they can stand in a certain neutrality the one to the other. But the new thing of Jesus is the invading kingdom of God revealed in its alienating antithesis to the world and all its orders.” See Gollwitzer’s (1961:104,105) selections in *Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics*.

<sup>25</sup> Firstly, he addresses the “committed Christians” who are those who, I assume, share his exclusivist convictions with regard to dialogue. His implores them (1994:13) to beware of becoming so “desensitised by the tolerance of our age that we can see Christ dethroned in the minds of the multitudes and turn away as if we didn’t notice”. Secondly, he addresses his book towards adherents of other faiths. I quote him in this regard (1994:111): “In discussion with a member of the Baha’i faith, I pointed out that Bahá’u’lláh was disqualified because his teachings contradicted those of Christ. “Are you saying God can’t speak today?” he asked, thinking that my convictions put arbitrary limits on God. “Of course God can speak whenever He wants to,” I said, “but when the sun comes out there is no need for the stars.” This particular quote helps to show the density of the fundamentalist argument i.e. the tight nature of the structure of the theological system that expects no quarter and gives none either. This is a battle and victory must be won at all costs. Statements of fact are asserted in a way that countenances no disputation, since Lutzer’s mind is utterly made up before the dialogue even begins. Dialogue is less about discussion as it is about winning. Of course at this level of dialogue there is nothing that stops a Hindu devotee from making every bit as convincing an argument as Lutzer’s by merely replacing Krishna for Christ as the “sun,” making this style of argument a dead end as far as genuine dialogue is concerned. This, of course, is the fundamentalist agenda as we shall later see, for any concession on the slightest point would render the entire belief structure suspect and liable to collapse.

<sup>26</sup> Lutzer (1994:196) rightly regrets the church’s actions of burning the heretics at the stake. He ameliorates Christian responsibility by deflecting blame, pointing to the influences of “pagan Rome” as the source of these problems that “confused political patriotism with religious commitment.” The upsurge of mythic and magic impulses from the lower reaches of religious development always pose a threat to the higher stages. For Lutzer, however, there are no deeper and wider stages of faith. His mythic rational level remains, for him, the ultimate revelation. Thus, when “liberal Christians” and “New Agers” begin to speak of inclusivism and pluralism, he is only able to compare these to his own experiences of lower mythic and magic realms (“pagan Rome”). More on this “pre/trans fallacy” later.

<sup>27</sup> Carl E. Braaten’s (1992) response to Knitter’s *No other name?* comes is appropriately entitled *No other gospel!* Braaten is utterly convinced that Knitter’s work represents a turning aside to a “different gospel” that proclaims a different Jesus. It falls victim to the “sceptical spirit of our age” and so feels the need to revisit the old Gnostic doubts about there being only one saviour, one way of salvation. My contention is that Braaten has adequately understood Knitter’s rational level theology in *No other name?* and has chosen to reject it, as it his right to do. He is somewhat startled and unsettled, however, by Knitter’s deft move into the next dialogical level of dialogue, leaving Braaten the choice to explore with Knitter, or even more forcefully to reiterate the comforting doctrines of Christian superiority. Braaten, as I see it, has misunderstood Knitter’s heart. Knitter (1987:187) has attempted – and by his own admission, this is an incomplete attempt in need of debate and revision – to express a Christian theology of religions that takes seriously the right of other faiths to speak without having to view them through Christian doctrinal categories before being able to appreciate and speak of their validity, truth and beauty. This process does take Knitter into new and unexplored territory, essential if theology is ever to grow out of its self-complacency. Braaten would do well to acknowledge the extent that he is *possessed* by his convictions as opposed to him being *in possession* of those convictions, which would take him some way in the shift from the early rational level to centauric.

<sup>28</sup> See Krister Stendahl, “Notes on three Bible studies,” in G. Anderson and T Stransky 1981:14-15.

<sup>29</sup> See Panikkar’s *The unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1981:14).

## Endnotes to chapter 2

<sup>30</sup> According to Vedanta, a person is composed of five *koshas* – “sheaths” or levels of being which are

comparable to the layers in an onion. The most outer sheath is the *annamayakosha*, or "sheath made of food". This is the physical level. The next is *pranamayakosha*, *prana* being the vital energy of biological life (emotional sexual energy). The *manomayakosha* is the level of the abstract, logical and linguistic mind. Beyond the mind come two levels, the *vijnanamayakosha*, or intuitive level, and finally the *anandamayakosha*, or level of spiritual, transcendental bliss. The Mahayana Buddhist model of consciousness speaks of the three *vijnanas* (levels). Following the five senses is the mind (*manovijnana*) that operates on the senses. The *manas* is that level of consciousness that is able to look down at the separate self-sense, and up to the *alayavijnana*, or transpersonal consciousness. Beyond the eight levels is pure and empty consciousness, or spirit. Wilber follows these sequences more or less exactly and by combining these with the insights of the so-called third wave of psychological sciences - humanistic, depth, and gestalt, argues persuasively for his spectrum of consciousness.

- <sup>31</sup>The issue of the relation between language and knowledge of ultimate reality or mystical knowledge is a crucial one. See especially "Language and mystical awareness" by Frederick Streng in *Mysticism and philosophical analysis* (in Katz (ed) 1978), Ninian Smart's essay "Interpretation and mystical knowledge" in *Religious studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1965), and further discussion below.
- <sup>32</sup>Consider the following excerpt from Foucault (in Wilber 1995:153): "I think that there is a widespread and facile tendency, which one should combat, to designate that which has just occurred as the primary enemy, as if were always the principle form of oppression from which one has to liberate oneself. Now this simple attitude entails a number of dangerous consequences: first, an inclination to seek out some cheap form of archaism or some imaginary past forms of happiness that people did not, in fact, have at all. There is in this hatred of the present a dangerous tendency to invoke a completely mythical past."
- <sup>33</sup>The idea is explicitly seen in Schelling (1775-1854) Hegel (1770-1831). Herbert Spencer made evolution a universal law, and Darwin (1809-1882). Aurobindo (1872-1950) gave it its most accurate spiritual context, with Teilhard (1881-1955) ensuring a clearer understanding for the west (in Wilber 1998:63).
- <sup>34</sup>See Alan Watts' *The supreme identity* Watts (1950).
- <sup>35</sup>See Washburn (1995:38 ff.)
- <sup>36</sup>See Cobb's (1999:148-149) detailed critique of the limitations of Lindbeck's linguistic approach.
- <sup>37</sup>Aquinas uses Aristotle's philosophical framework to explicate his theology. Aristotle's God, however, has precisely nothing to do with the relative, material world, since involvement with creatures would indicate a lack of fullness. God requires nothing. The creative act, insofar as it has to do with need, cannot be postulated of God. God is "in" the relative world only as a final cause, that to which all creatures strive yet never reach, since God is utterly self-contained in His perfection. This doctrine means that human ascent into their full potential will always be frustrated, never achieved. Aristotle's doctrine of God is an excellent example of a philosophy of the One without being fully complemented by a philosophy of the Many.
- <sup>38</sup>For example see *The self-organizing universe* (Jantsch 1980), *Evolution: the grand synthesis* (Laszlo 1987). Wilber acknowledges the brilliance of these accounts as an empirical study. He criticizes their attempt, however, to apply their insights to interiority. A different hermeneutic needs to be applied in order to avoid subtle reductionism.
- <sup>39</sup>The example Wilber (1995:122) is fond of using: "Nobody ever saw the square root of negative one running around in the external world; that is only apprehended interiorly."
- <sup>40</sup>Taking just three levels of the human holon as an example, matter, life, and mind. Each level maintains itself in a network of relations with holons at the same depth: "The physical body exists within a system of relational exchange with other physical bodies - in terms of gravitation, material forces and energies, light water, environmental weather and so on ... Likewise humanity reproduces itself biologically through emotional-sexual relations organized in a family and an appropriate social environment, and depends for its biological existence on a whole network of other biological systems (and ecosystems)... Finally, human beings reproduce themselves mentally through exchanges with cultural and symbolic environments, the very essence of which is the exchange of symbols with other symbol exchangers... In short, as holons evolve, each layer of depth continues to exist in (and depend upon) a network of relationships with other holons at the same level of structural organization" (Wilber 1995:66).
- <sup>41</sup>A term Wilber uses to denote the mode of knowing found in the realm of spirituality, as opposed to *sensibilia*, and *intelligibilia*, the eye of flesh, of mind and of spirit. See *Eye to eye* (Wilber 1983).
- <sup>42</sup>This collapse of the left hand to the right hand was, according to Wilber (1995:557) the fundamental Enlightenment paradigm, which generated "both a self-defining disengaged subject and a holistic

natural worldview (or systems theory)" Habermas (1990:384) in reference to this period speaks of the "philosophy of the subject" which entailed the easy slide of the "self-defining subject" into the "self-organizing system", which he describes as a "cognitive-instrumental one-sidedness of cultural and societal rationalization" that became an attempt to find "an objectivistic self-understanding of human beings and their world." What was first described in mechanistic terms soon came to be spoken of in biological terms following the Darwinian revolution. A simple case of metabiology replacing metaphysics. "To the extent that systems theory penetrates into the lifeworld, introducing into it a metabiological perspective from which it then learns to understand itself as a system in an environment-with-other-systems-in-an-environment, to that extent there is an objectifying effect. In this way, subject-centered reason is replaced by systems rationality."

<sup>43</sup> See <http://monkeyfist.com/ChomskyArchive/essays/skinner.html>

<sup>44</sup> Wilber (1995:584) here follows the work of Gertrude and Rubin Blanck who introduced the term "fulcrum of development" to refer to the separation/individuation of the infant's self from the emotional (m)other. This work was itself based on Margaret Mahler's pioneering work in the field of child development. In *Transformations of consciousness* Wilber (1986) outlines about ten or so fulcrums which each represent a qualitatively new and distinct level of differentiation/integration in human development. Each fulcrum establishes a new self boundary, or self sense. Thus for Wilber, each fulcrum represents the different and very appropriate (for that stage, but not ultimately sufficient) self stages as the individual negotiates its way through the basic structures of cognition, with each stage unfolding developmentally and holarchically. Wilber points out that the orthodox researchers in the field, such as Piaget, Mahler, Kernberg, etc. stop their research at around the sixth fulcrum because they do not recognize, or simply ignore, the transpersonal fulcrums (7-9). These are the fulcrums we are particularly interested in but for now, we need to lay the groundwork in order to show exactly how and where regression takes place, when it does, during interfaith dialogue.

<sup>45</sup> Or to put it in terms of age: Sensorimotor (0-2 years), preoperational or "preop" (2-7 years), concrete operational or "conop" (7-11 years) and formal operational, or "formop" (11 onwards). These are Piaget's division of cognitive development into four broad stages.

<sup>46</sup> For a fuller discussion of this see Wilber 1995:589.

<sup>47</sup> In summarizing Teilhard's understanding of the arrival of the noosphere, Joseph Kopp (1964:40) says, "Like the origin of life, man's inception was not a gradual process: it was the single, sudden crossing of the borderline between two generations, a kind of mutation into a new nature (this is the holon's characteristic of emergence, Wilber's (1995:46) third tenet for holons). Man was something new. Since he has populated the earth, a dense covering of thinking brains covers our planet, an intellectual envelope, which Teilhard de Chardin calls the 'noosphere'". Kopp goes on to say that "the noosphere is the work of the whole of nature. The whole earth has taken part in its creation (which is) why man is not just a new branch of the tree of life (i.e. Wilber's (1995:51) fifth tenet; each emergent holon transcends but includes its predecessors). (He is) the flower of evolution, aspired to from the first, and slowly and methodically prepared for billions of years."

<sup>48</sup> Contrary to the impression that reason is limited only to dry abstraction and mathematical formulae, Wilber suggests that formal operational thinking introduces a whole new world of passions, dreams and idealistic strivings precisely because of the space of new possibilities that can be envisioned. "All of this," says Wilber, (1995:235), "comes from being able to see the possibilities of what might be, possibilities seen only with the mind's eye...(the) great, great doorway to the invisible and beyond, as Plato, and Pythagoras, and Shankara, and every mystic worth his or her salt has always, always known. The higher developments do indeed lie beyond reason, but never, never, beneath it."

<sup>49</sup> Wilber is using Habermas' research found in *Communication and the evolution of society* (1979).

<sup>50</sup> "If one examines social institutions and the action competences of socialized individuals for general characteristics, one encounters the same structures of consciousness. This can be shown in connection with law and morality... that can be described as preconventional, conventional and postconventional patterns of problem solving.... The homologous structures of consciousness in the histories of the individual and the species [are not restricted to the domain of law and morality. They can also be found] in the domain of ego development and the evolution of worldviews..." (Habermas in Wilber 1995:149).

<sup>51</sup> Given the predominance of female deities in horticultural societies, but male deities in agrarian societies, Wilber (1995:159) makes a simple observation: "Where women work the fields with a hoe, God is a Woman; when men work the fields with a plow, God is a Man." The point is that the emerging differentiation between biosphere and noosphere needed a new integration on a societal level. Viewing patriarchy in an evolutionary light helps to avoid the unhelpful belief that patriarchy

was something that could have been avoided, an idea that tends to make oppressors out of men and victims out of women. Thus seeing patriarchy as a result of a novel emergent structure of consciousness, a structure that for the first time differentiates biosphere from the noosphere, means that it can now be viewed as not something that could have been avoided, but rather something that needs to be outgrown. "The new emergence" says Wilber (1995:164), "is difficult for all, precisely because it in many ways means leaving the predeterminedness and comfort of biological givens. In the course of history and prehistory, it would take three or four major and profound cultural transformations to climb up out of this biological destiny. (And each step would have its own and very new forms of pathology and possible dissociation, all of which would have to be negotiated - sometimes not very successfully)."

<sup>52</sup> Wilber's term. For example, a very real person called Adam would have walked in a literal garden called Eden, and Moses would have parted the Red Sea as an empirical fact.

<sup>53</sup> I recall hearing Billy Graham recounting a crisis time he faced during his theological training. When confronted with the difficulties that arise out of the rational level critiques of Scripture (Form criticism, Historical Critical hermeneutics) of Biblical texts, he came to the decision to base his faith on the maxim: "The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it!" Is this not a choice that forgoes the potential for growth offered by the rational level? Is it not a choice motivated by a fear of the loss of power that the mythology at the mythic level offers the mythic believer?

<sup>54</sup> Those interested in how Wilber arrives at and maps these four transpersonal levels as a reconstructive and not speculative science, can consult his *Eye to eye* (1983), *Transformations of consciousness*, Walsh and Vaughan's *Paths beyond ego* (1993), Alexander and Langer's *Higher stages of human development* (1990), or Aurobindo's *Life divine* (n.d.).

<sup>55</sup> This confusing of the transpersonal and prepersonal realms because of their surface similarities Wilber calls the "pre/trans fallacy". The "pre-fallacy" refers to those that refuse to acknowledge, or just cannot "see" the higher, transpersonal realms, will tend reduce these to prepersonal realms. To give a concrete example, Christian dialogians at the mythic-rational realm will mistake the interconnectedness of the centauric level for magical indissociation. The fury of their rejection of these higher levels of dialogue makes sense, since the magical levels of pagan individuals were overcome with proselytising zeal and mythological social structures against which the pagan societies stood no chance, so mythic rational dialogians believe that similar strategies will work on the centauric dialogians, Christian or otherwise. "Trans fallacies" are those that elevate the prepersonal to the level of the transpersonal, again because of their surface similarities. Rationality becomes the scapegoat on which to place the woes of the modern world, while the virtues of nature are not only extolled, but given as exemplars of spiritual transcendence. Nature worshipers, who never look within themselves long enough to find the Over-Soul with which to find the true beyond, are in fact destroyers of true Nature. Wilber takes to task the ecophilosophers who want to take nature as just another word for Spirit, which leads to two problems; if nature is destroyed, then God is also destroyed. If one saves nature, then one has saved God too. It is because these "ecophilosophers confuse fundamental with significant", says Wilber (1995:611) "they cannot see the ever widening ontological circle that goes from nature to culture to Spirit."

<sup>56</sup> Note that Wilber also uses the words "streams" and "waves" to refer to the lines of development and stages of development respectively (see Wilber 2000:330).

<sup>57</sup> See Wilber (1998:213 and 2000:331) where he comments on the problem of many meditative practices that tend to concentrate exclusively on the cognitive stream (awareness) or spiritual and higher affects (love and compassion). They generally tend to ignore the other streams, such as emotional, interpersonal relationships, or morality. As progress is made in meditation, the person can become quite unbalanced, such as being deeply spiritually aware but impossible to live with. The solution is for the person to adopt a more integrated approach, which means more than merely meditating, but taking seriously the body's nutritional and exercise needs, the psyche's need to uncover early childhood traumas, interpersonal and moral needs, as well as cognitive and spiritual growth. Thus, practicing in and with a spiritual community, such as a church group, of the similarly deepened, is probably the most conducive environment for genuine spiritual growth and transcendence.

<sup>58</sup> The notion Katz is concerned to counter (quite popular with thinkers such as Stace (1961) and Toynbee (1962) and others) is that religious experience, no matter how differently it might be interpreted, centers around a common core. Differences are ascribed to cultural and linguistic factors. As we will see, Katz's work refutes this rather naïve approach which finds itself rather vulnerable to the charge that it does not pay sufficient attention to the very real differences in

religious experience. Evidence gathered by the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford University, found that “although a distinction between cognitive and affective elements was originally thought to be a reasonable distinction... in practice, any such distinction breaks down [which means that] one cannot then bracket the cognitive content of religious experiences to focus on any core common to all” (Keenan 1989:190).

<sup>59</sup> At every stage of development the next higher or deeper stage appears otherworldly since the person has no means of recognizing that higher stage yet. The example Wilber (1995:267) offers is that of a preop child who is shown water in a tall glass poured into a short, fat glass of the same volume: The child will insist that the tall glass has more water. It is only when the child has developed to conop that she will understand that the volume of water stays the same irrespective of the shape of the glass, and will think that anyone who can't see the obviousness of this is stupid. “The preop child is *immersed* in a world that includes conop realities, is drenched in those realities, and yet cannot “see” them: they are all ‘otherworldly’”. People at a rational or centauric level of development are, in turn, immersed in spiritual realities but will not be able to “see” them until they develop further. Notice that these deeper worldspaces are not located elsewhere in the universe. They are here and now, deeper perceptions of this reality (“Heaven is in your heart” goes a popular Christian chorus). People at a mythical, or rational stage may do one of three things; reject those deeper realities because they cannot “see” them, exercise the necessary faith and trust in those who have sailed to those shores already, and have returned to show us the way by attempting to explain them rationally, or poetically, or sadly, interpret the rationally reconstructed accounts of those experiences down through their own intersubjective worldspace in order to legitimize their own level of cultural thinking (“my religion/country right of wrong” for the mythic level, or “there can be no cross-culturally valid interpretation of this phenomenon” for the late rational level.) All of this will become very important as we begin to see how Christians at varying levels of development interpret interfaith dialogue according to those levels, leading to interesting and sometimes volatile misunderstandings not only of other faiths, but within Christianity, with it divergent interpretations, itself.

<sup>60</sup> Transcendental signifieds offer the possibility of communication within and across cultures, even if mediated by language. This means that validity claims in language have both an immanent dimension as well as a transcendent dimension. The former refers to the “moment of universal validity [that] bursts every provinciality asunder” while the latter “renders them carriers of a context-bound everyday practice” (Habermas in Wilber 1995:602).

## Endnotes to chapter 3

<sup>61</sup> See the bibliography for details, especially Race (1983), Knitter (1985, 1996a, 1996b), Hick (1987, 1995), Smith (1980), Smart (1976, 1981), Krüger (1989, 1995), Cobb (1982, 1990, 1999) and Keenan (1989).

<sup>62</sup> Weber (in Wilber 1995:173) differentiates between scientific-technological knowledge (purposive rationality), mathematical knowledge (formal rationality) and the knowledge used in morality and communication (intersubjective rationality).

<sup>63</sup> See Küng's (1995:524 ff.) description of the paradigm shift that occurred during the reformation from the mediaeval Roman Catholic paradigm to the Reformed evangelical paradigm. An argument can be made for seeing the former in terms of Wilber's mythological level of development, the latter being an example of the slightly more integrated and deeper level of development to early mythic rational. Catholic mythological paradigm had come to the very limits of its ability to integrate the whole of society in the face of the ever-encroaching Enlightenment. I am limiting my analysis to the mythic rational reactions to modernity as seen most clearly in the move towards fundamentalism in Christianity, although parallel moves are clearly observable in many other religions as well (see *Fundamentalism as an ecumenical challenge* edited by Jurgen Moltmann & Hans Küng 1992).

<sup>64</sup> See *An abc of biblical exegesis* by F.E. Deist and J.J. Burden (1980).

<sup>65</sup> We have said that the mythic rationalists within Christianity are to be found not only within the ranks of the Protestant evangelicals, and certainly not all evangelicals are necessarily on the mythic rational level fundamentalists. Such distinctions would be too rigid. People and groupings rather flow through the different levels of the spectrum constantly. Nevertheless, we have been arguing that Protestant Evangelicals tend to exist primarily in, and operate out of, the mythic rational level in terms of their spirituality. An awareness of this is critical given the fact that “the fundamentalist

movement has... become one of the main ways of transmitting and inculturating the Protestant form of Christian faith in today's world" according to Miroslav Volf (in Küng and Moltmann 1992:98).

<sup>66</sup> In 1913 Julius Richter (in Hick 1987:17) defined missiology as "that branch of theology which in opposition to the non-Christian religions, shows the Christian religion to be the Way, the truth, and the Life; which seeks to dispossess the non-Christian religions and to plant in their stead in the soil of heathen national life the evangelical faith and the Christian life." The fusion, or embeddedness of the referent of faith (Christ) and the faith itself (as sign), along with religio-nationalist aspiration is clearly evident.

<sup>67</sup> "Those who withstand religious pluralism and [so] deny the lesser gods of our day, will be accused of intolerance and bigotry... [yet] a Christian theology is bound to reject the pantheism or polytheism of (say) Hinduism... (Mathie n.d.: 13).

<sup>68</sup> Immanuel Kant's three critiques of Pure reason, Practical Reason and Judgement showed that the three spheres of science, morality and art were now clearly differentiated from the mythic rational syncretisms in which these are still largely fused. This fusion, far from being holistic, distorts the whole/part so that they cannot be taken at face value, but are forced into religious dogma. Art is only art if it portrays something of the mythic organization. Thus, says Wilber (1995:391) "I" need no longer go along with society's rules and norms; I can norm the norms; what church and state say are not necessarily the true or the good.

<sup>69</sup> Luke 17:21

<sup>70</sup> See James Barr's arguments on the issue of Biblical inspiration and authority in *Escaping from fundamentalism* (1984:1 ff).

<sup>71</sup> See Lutzer's *Christ among the gods* (1994:186, 193).

<sup>72</sup> See J.I. Packer's foreword to Lutzer's *Christ among the gods* (1994:7). The great gift to consciousness at this stage is the ability to narratize one's experience of faith and bind them into meaning through the medium of stories. Here, one's religious identity is embedded in the story of one's relationships and roles within the faith – hence Fowler's (1995:135) term *mythic-literal*. Thus before Erwin Lutzer proceeds to map out his understanding of interfaith dialogue, he first tells the old, old story of the Christian faith, which is then as absolute truth, thereby relativising all other faith claims that seek to contradict that story, and, most importantly, his role in that ongoing story. Relativising the story would mean the complete break up of his faith identity, a necessary part of the process for transformation, but also carries with it the danger of a nihilistic and complete loss of faith, or "backsliding."

<sup>73</sup> I have taken some liberties in Christianising Wilber's (2000:135) UL description of the patrifocal, agrarian mythological religions. Wilber (2000:145): "The rise of patrifocal agrarian societies was often marked by a sharp break with human sacrifice, but a retention of many of its themes in symbolic or reduced form (as in the Catholic Mass – 'Take, eat, this is my body; take, drink, this is my blood'). The patriarchal mythic religions saw themselves as more ethical than the previous earth-worshipping pagan religions, largely because of the banning of human sacrifice." One begins to see that a person at this level views a faith – Christian or others – that has progressed beyond the mythic-literal stage as being pagan. "This overall mythic level is one that Jungian psychology often confuses with transrational spiritual domains." This is the elevating of the prepersonal to the transpersonal, whereas a person within this level would reduce the transpersonal to the prepersonal and condemn it as pagan, or worse.

<sup>74</sup> Lutzer 1994: 166-173

<sup>75</sup> Lutzer 1994: 177

## Endnotes to Chapter 4

<sup>76</sup> To give a contemporary example: The Western world is largely at the rational stage, with the cutting edge of development at the centauric worldcentric, postconventional stage. For most of humanity's history, the Left- and Right-Hand quadrants developed at more or less the same rate. In the Lower Left, the evolution from archaic to magic to mythic to rational was accompanied, in the Lower Right, by technological development that moved, respectively, from foraging, to horticultural, to agrarian, and to industrial. The worldviews on the magic level went with a foraging economic (LR) base, the mythic worldviews went with an agrarian base, and the rational worldviews have had an industrial base. However, with the rise of modernity with its rational-industrial systems, the increasing globalisation of economic and cultural exchange has meant that tribal cultures could

gain access to rational-industrial technology. Thus, Al Qaeda, which is on a magic/mythic level of development, has access to nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons that historically they would never have been able to produce themselves. The Right-Hand Quadrants of the rational are all material, and so their products can be obtained by individuals at almost any level of interior, Left-Hand development (see Wilber 2000b: 115-127). This means that Al Qaeda is able to propagate its magic/mythic worldview using the tools of the rational, but without the equivalent rational level of moral, ethical and other lines of development. On the other hand, it also means that the American Government also needs to examine the “beam in their own eyes.” They operate at a mythic rational level has amassed unprecedented amounts military power in order to achieve the level’s two-fold aim of protecting its mythology (“the American way of life”) and material or wealth assimilation (a largely rational level need) largely at the expense of the rest of the world. The “War on Terror” as Bush so indelicately puts it, is at its foundation an ideological clash between the worldviews of the magic/mythic level and the mythic-rational level. It will take dialogians at higher levels of development to keep both from using the respective religions (i.e. a civil/patriotic blend of Christianity in the United States and a particularly vitriolic form of Islamic fundamentalism for Al Qaeda) as a justification for war.

<sup>77</sup> Baudrillard (in Powell 1998:58) pointed out that one of the characteristics of postmodern society its signs and images no longer bear any resemblance to the “real” world. They create their own hyperreality, which is an order of representation that is not meant to portray unreality, but creates its own reality to be more real than real. Within this hyperreality, all potentially explosive political or religious antagonisms that inhabit the real are imploded into one another. Thus the answer(s) to the question, for example, of who is responsible for the Palestinian suicide bombings, is already pre-programmed by set media responses that are “whirlgigging, in absurd, perverse, nauseous circles, orbiting around the merest fact – according to established codes or models...spinning out spiralling galaxies of representations of events, positive and negative, real and simulacrum, imploding inwards to a point of absolute absorption – where the difference between real and simulation disappears – implodes into nothing.” (Powell 1998:62-63). In this hyperconformist world so obsessed and mesmerised by spectacle, an apathy sets in that does not take religious differences seriously, but would rather be entertained by a smorgasbord of Japanese Shinto drumming accompanying chart-topping Gregorian chant choirs, followed by an Ayurvedic soyburgers. This is the critique that might well be levelled at the 1999 World Parliament of Religions in Cape Town: it is fashion conscious interfaith dialogue designed and paraded on an international cat-walk by American Baby Boomers. Endless vistas of religious paraphernalia and noise, a religious marketplace of surface simulacra, glittering and inviting; yet vanishing into the emptiness of religious consumerism. Here if anywhere, one experienced the death of meaning, the death of the religious. However, shall we simply accept Baudrillard’s solution to this ecstasy of religious communication? Shall we merely surrender passively to the flow of religious images that seek to pacify and numb? I think there is another way.

<sup>78</sup> This was the express opinion of Brian Gaybba as given in several lectures on Barth at Rhodes University.

<sup>79</sup> By this, I mean an analysis of other faiths that takes seriously their scriptures and truth claims divorced from a specifically Christian interpretation of those faiths.

<sup>80</sup> See Braaten’s *No other gospel!* (1992:69).

<sup>81</sup> Better known as the First World War.

<sup>82</sup> See Morton Kelsey’s *Transcend* (1981:93)

<sup>83</sup> See Gordon Kaufman in Hick and Knitter (1987:3).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p.4.

<sup>85</sup> See Michael Green’s contribution to *The truth of God incarnate* (in Green 1977:111).

<sup>86</sup> Langdon Gilkey (in Hick and Knitter 1987:39) speaking about the theological and cultural shifts that have taken place in mainly liberal Protestantism. In my present faith story, I have tried to keep a balance between the more conservative inclusivist position and a full-blown pluralist position, both of which would find a home on the rational level, since both positions (including some exclusivists for that matter) could and do find strong rationally based arguments for their stance. Recall that we are dealing here not with models, but with a spectrum, a continuity, that will find a number of conflicting positions vying for support.

<sup>87</sup> Fowler’s (1981:174 ff.) Individuative-Reflective level.

## Endnotes to chapter 5

- <sup>88</sup> See Chomsky on [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Chomsky/Common\\_Good\\_Chomsky.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Chomsky/Common_Good_Chomsky.html)
- <sup>89</sup> David Mamet (1999:32) insists that America had to contrive the escape of Saddam Hussein in order to allow a rematch, so that the wartime spending on a military budget can be justified in peacetime situations. He says, "If there is no rematch, if there is victory, and there is no subsequent aggressor, then the ... Defence department is done... And however we feel defrauded, defiled, disillusioned, it is in our nature to love drama; and when the title fight rolls round again – when Clinton confronts Bin Laden – we march to the sound of drums." Note that this article was written two years before 9/11.
- <sup>90</sup> By advocating this dialogical framework for Christians, I am not thereby insinuating that Krüger is himself Christian. I take it that by this stage Christians are open to exploring and utilising frameworks that are not ostensibly "Christian", but can judge these on their own merits irrespective of its cultural or religious roots.
- <sup>91</sup> See especially Krüger's *Metatheism: Early Buddhism and traditional Christian theism* (1989).
- <sup>92</sup> Yagi (in Hick and Knitter 1987:117 ff) bases his thesis on Takizawa Katsumi's (1909-1984) distinction between the primary and secondary contacts of God with the human self. The primary contact is an unconditional fact for all selves, the very ground of unity that exists between self and God. We are usually ignorant of that identity, but may waken to this fact in a way that allows the self to live in conscious accord with God. This awakening is the secondary contact. Thus Paul's statements such as "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21) and "Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20) are indications of his "I" having a double structure, composed of both the ego and the infinite ("Formless") self, which paradoxically, enables him to speak of both the "I" that signifies the egoic self that is captive to sin (Rom. 7:17; "It is no longer I who perform it, but sin that dwells in me") and the "I" that has become aware of Christ as his ultimate subject and ground of being (Gal. 2:19f.) "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live; Christ lives in me. And the life I live now in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me and sacrificed himself for me. The problem with this approach is that eventually, the gift of uniqueness that each faith offers is explained away in order to accommodate the understanding of the investigating faith. Thus, in this example, Takizawa infers that the disciples did not distinguish between the primary and secondary contacts in Jesus, thus leading to the mistaken conclusion that the historical person was resurrected. Now, whilst the historical and bodily resurrection of Jesus might be too much for Takizawa to contemplate given the restraints of his Buddhist interpretive model, it has nevertheless been a central and defining core of the Christian faith. To dismiss it simply because of an alternative hermeneutical framework seems something of a loss given the strength, motivation and courage the doctrine has lent to Christians for millennia. This is precisely the argument that may be used to caution Christians from too hastily straining Buddhist or any other doctrines through Christian interpretive lenses.
- <sup>93</sup> The theological effects of pluralism are profound and requires something a little more radical than merely "modernising" or "demythologising". These, in attempting to relativise past expressions of symbols, have gone on to relativise the symbols themselves (see Gilkey in Hick and Knitter 1987:41). The problematic involves all theological doctrines, not just some of them. Thus, it helps little by moderating just the Christology, or just Christian Soteriology for the sake of dialogue, since each doctrine or symbol within any given system differs markedly from seemingly analogous symbols in others systems. This means that John Hick's (1980, 1985, 1987) various attempts at moderating the Christian doctrines of God and Christ are still particularistic in the theistic assumptions as against, say, the metatheistic assumptions of Buddhism.
- <sup>94</sup> Traditionally called "mystical theologians." See for example the appendix to Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*, pp. 453-473.
- <sup>95</sup> Steven Katz (1983:3-51) has done a magnificent job of disabusing us of the common caricature that prejudices mysticism as an autonomous realm of experience that fits somewhat uneasily into its religious context(s). Mystics are not those rare souls whose journey takes them soaring above the dogma and tradition of her or his less fortunate religionists into a realm that is common to all mystics irrespective of their tradition. Whilst it is in no way necessary to agree entirely with his conclusion that the form of consciousness that the mystic brings to the mystic experience places strict and un-transcendable limitations on that experience itself, we can heartily agree that whilst mysticism certainly does contain elements of radical protest against a too shallow interpretation of the ultimate, there are, dialectically, as many conservative and traditional elements in the teachings of mystics too. Thus not even Eckhart is an Advaitan, Katz (1983:33) insists, since even though he faced very complex metaphysical and theological difficulties in his interpretation of the No-



thingness of God, he still had a striking ontological commitment towards remaining utterly Christocentric in his approach.

<sup>96</sup> See Ricoeur's *The symbolism of evil* 1967:351-352).

<sup>97</sup> See Fowler 1981:198

<sup>98</sup> In *The coming of the Cosmic Christ* (1988:92), Matthew Fox challenges Edward Schillebeeckx's rational level hermeneutical argument that the author of Ephesians thought in terms of historical and ecclesiastical terms. Fox offers a far more centauric interpretation when he suggests that the author wrote with a much wider, cosmic perspective in mind. Instead of the church being seen only in terms of history, it ought to be viewed in "deep ecumenical" terms i.e. that the "people of God" is not limited to too anthropocentric, institutional or even religio-centric terms. "Arrogance abounds when the cosmos is left out or appropriated unconsciously to oneself or one's institutions. Humans, as individuals and communities, are more likely to celebrate diversity and to be creative if they live within a cosmos rather than limited to assemblies upon which they strive to invoke the grace of God." Some of Fox's examples of deep ecumenism (see 1988:235-239) do suffer from bouts of classic pre/trans fallacies, such as equating Eckhart's deeply transpersonal "superessential darkness" with an obviously prepersonal worship of Gaia, the ancient mother goddess. Nevertheless, Fox offers an excellent example of the centauric respect for its own symbols harmonised, though the concept of the "Cosmic Christ" with a desire and willingness to learn from the riches of other faith traditions.

<sup>99</sup> Let us end by correlating Fowler's faith stage model with Wilber's (1995:595-596) integral approach:

Fowler's stage 1 or "projective, magical" stage of faith is Wilber's magical or preop (Piaget).

Stage 2 is "mythic-literal" is early comop, with faith extending to "those like us." This is Wilber's mythic level.

Stage 3 is "conventional faith" where there is "mutual role taking and conformity to class norms and interests." This is comparable to Wilber's mythic rational level, the level on which so many Christians find themselves today. Clearly it is a level in which interfaith dialogue is largely limited to a desire to find out more about other faiths in order to convert them to the one true religion.

Stage 4's level of faith is "individual-reflexive," Wilber's rational level or formop in which the ego is involved in "reflexive relativism" which allows it to formulate and hold a "self-ratified ideological perspective."

Stage 5, or "conjunctive faith" where "dialectical" formop emerges to "include groups, classes and traditions other than its own" which allows a "dialectical joining of judgement-experience processes with reflexive claims of others and of various expressions of cumulative human wisdom." Thus, we see the emergence of the possibility of genuine interfaith dialogue in which dialogians have developed the capacity to hear each other without preconceived ideas of superiority necessarily clouding their hearing. In Wilber's schema this level is postconventional, universal rationality and universal pluralism, a mature ego, and the beginning of a worldcentric orientation" for the self system

Stage 6 is "universalising" and is "informed by the experiences and truths of the previous stages" which allows it to unify self and the reality mediated by its own faith and other faith's symbols. Since on this level the "self is purified of egoic striving and linked by disciplined intuition to the principle of being" and involved in a "commonwealth of being" and a "trans-class awareness and identification," Wilber is able to find a correlation with his vision-logic and mature centaur, as well as the beginnings of transpersonal intuition; "The higher contemplative stages were not investigated by Fowler, given their rarity" says Wilber (19995:596) which is pretty much where we shall have to leave our study of the development of dialogical levels, since dialogue and the higher contemplative levels tend to move into silence, unknowing, the realm of this moment that exists before it is rendered less immediate through representation in language.

<sup>100</sup> This is the Troeltschian point of "wretched historicism" which he saw as the collapse of human values and an abandonment of any criteria for the interpretation of religious truth (see Race 1983:81). This despair caused by what appears to be the inevitable consequence of embracing relativity can only be overcome by bravely moving towards dialogue in spite of these fears. It is in the dialogical encounter itself that the next level of transcendence and integration appears, namely, the centauric and higher, transpersonal levels.

<sup>101</sup> To cite just one example - involvement in shareholder participation activities that call international corporations to account for their invisible activities and decision-making processes, which result in the destruction of human and ecological communities. Shareholders of publicly traded corporations may vote on aspects of company policy. Through the purchase of stock, individuals

and institutions can voice their opinion. However, to make a real difference, a relatively large portions of the company's stock needs to be owned in order to make enough of an impact on corporate policy. One group that has done the most to develop the techniques of shareholder activism is the Interfaith Centre for Corporate Responsibility in New York. For the last twenty five years, approximately 250 religious denominations belonging to the ICCR have consolidated their financial resources in order to force companies to act on issues such as *Apartheid*, equal opportunity for minority groups, alcohol and tobacco, the environment, militarism, sweatshops in foreign countries, child labour, and other issues. Centaur level social activity occurs outside of specifically interfaith movements, obviously, such as in the environmental struggle of groups such as Rainforest Action Network, which has a campaign to pressurise Mitsubishi Corporation to cease its clearing programmes in tropical rainforests; the Student Environmental Action Coalition which organizes college students on many global issues, and Greenpeace, which needs little introduction.

<sup>102</sup> See Kenneth Leech's *Soul friend* (1994:182 ff.)

## Endnotes to chapter 6

<sup>103</sup> Ken Wilber (2000:244) speaks of the "mental worldview – of which the "rational worldview" is the best known subset. I have continued to use "rational" for the sake of simplicity. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Western rationality is not the only expression of this LL level. Indigenous Africans, for example, would have had access to this level of worldview without it being defined by Aristotelian logic, the scientific method etc.

<sup>104</sup> Whilst this opinion is subject to further research, I would think that the exception to this are the John Main seminars organised and run by Lawrence Freeman, OSB as a work of the World Community for Christian Mediation. See *The good heart* by HH Dalai Lama (in Kiely (ed.) 1996).

<sup>105</sup> Colossians 3:11.

<sup>106</sup> A concern raised by many ex-Christians who have used this as a reason for having abandoned the faith of their youth for one that seemed to lend itself to greater expressions of inner freedom. The point is that every faith has its mythic rational forms. Many Theravadin Buddhists seem unwilling to take seriously that several of their codes of conduct for monks in the *Vinaya*, (see de Graaff 1994) written in a feudal, agrarian culture, bear little meaning in the industrial, democratic world. Their insistence that each law be religiously adhered to is not unlike pre-Reformation Catholicism, or fundamentalist Christians insisting on the infallibility of the Bible.

<sup>107</sup> A rational level pathology.

<sup>108</sup> The real fear on the mythic rational level.

<sup>109</sup> A Zen saying which describes *satori*, or enlightenment. Having said this, there is nothing in *satori* that can be described or demonstrated intellectually. For "Zen has no business with ideas, and *satori* is a sort of inner perception...of Reality itself, so to speak. The ultimate destination of *satori* is towards the Self" (Suzuki 1969:93).

<sup>110</sup> Galatians 2:20

<sup>111</sup> See Arvind Sharma's article "*Skill in means*" in *early Buddhism and Christianity* (1990:23 ff.)

<sup>112</sup> The following information and diagrams are taken from Don Beck's article *The search for cohesion in the age of fragmentation* on <http://members.ams.chel.co.uk/f.visser3/wilber/beck2.html>

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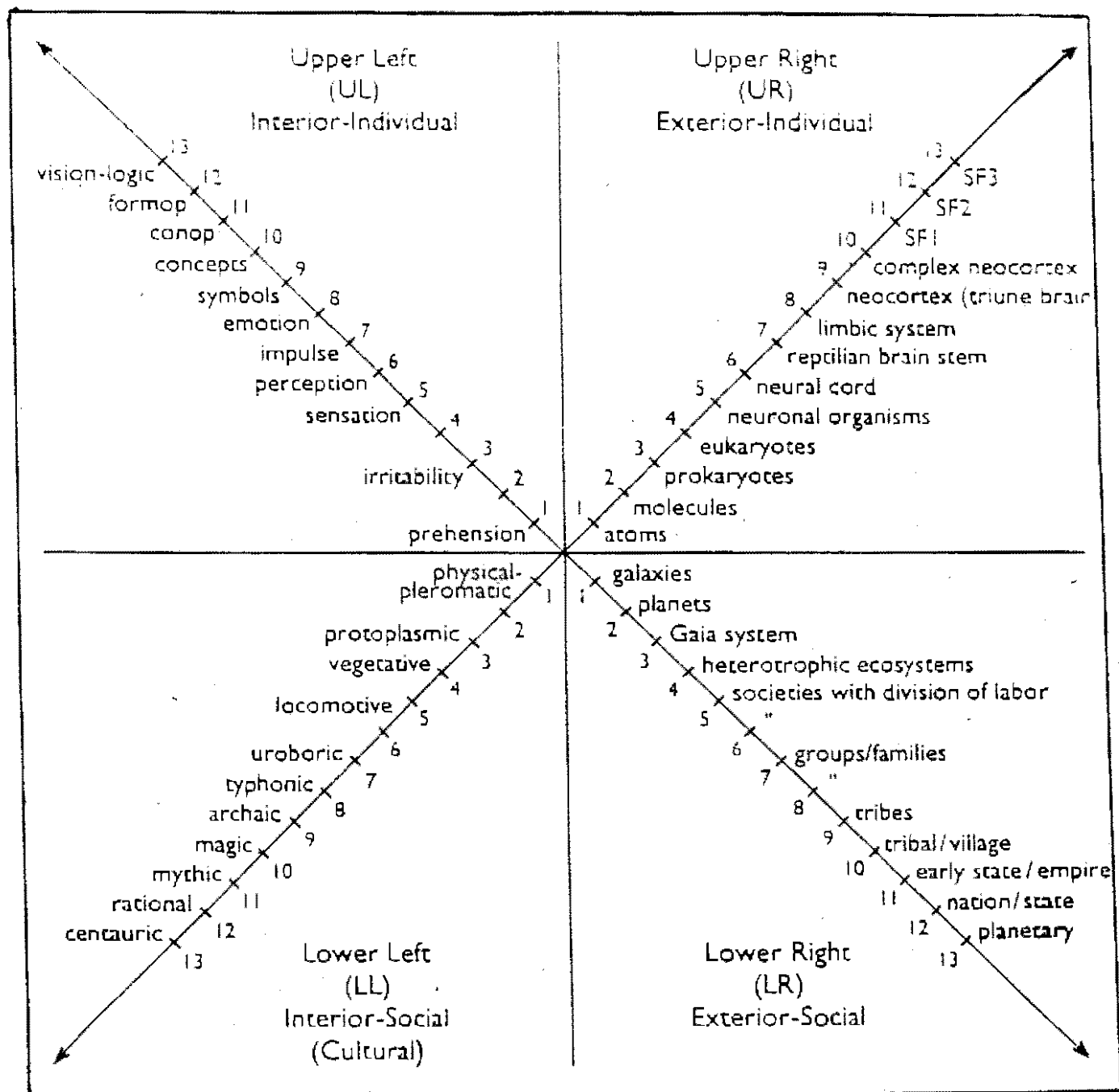
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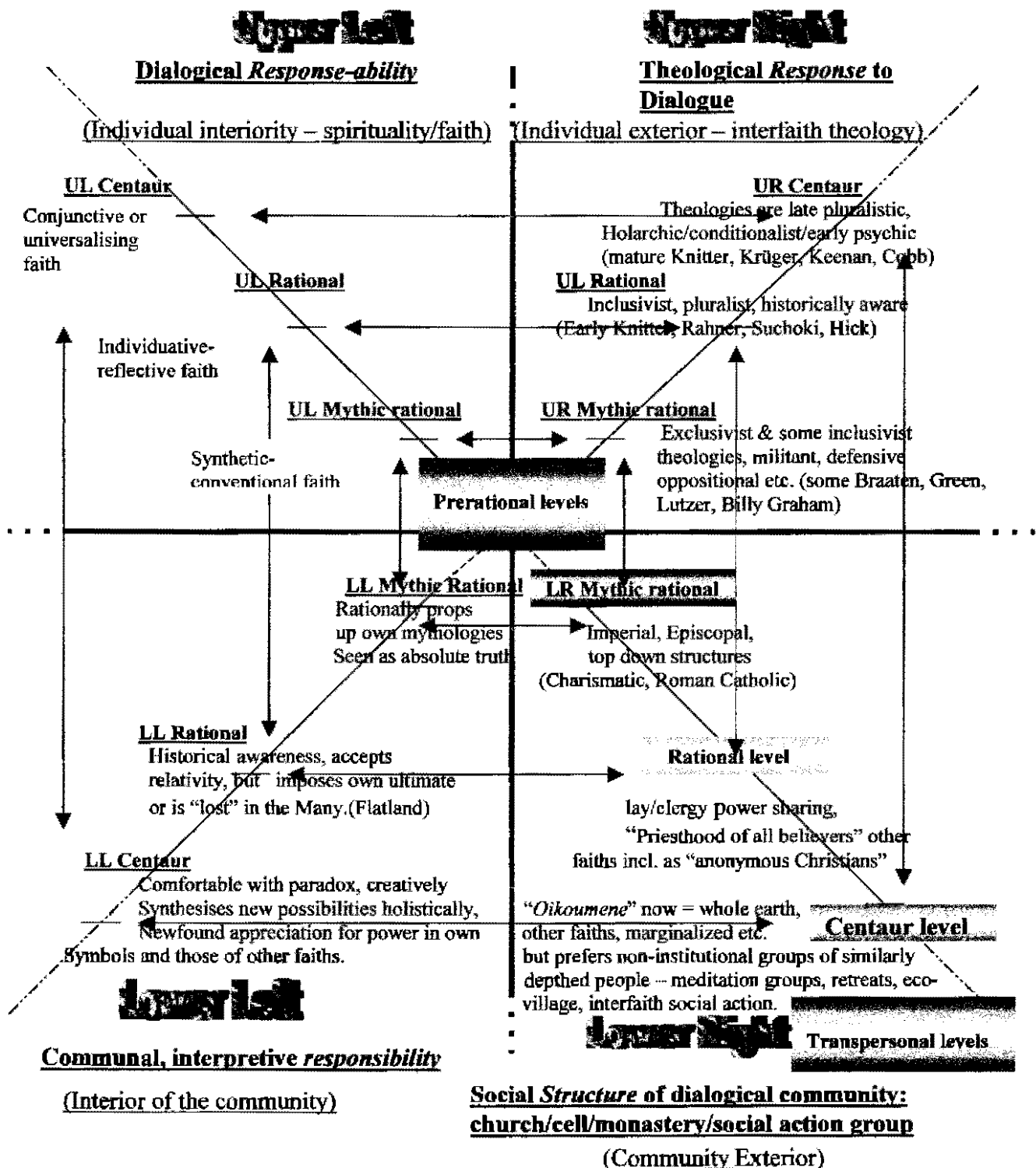


*Some Details of the Four Quadrants*

## Annexure 1

from Wilber (1995:193)





## Annexure 2:

### The integral, All-Quadrant All Level Development of the Christian responsibility towards Interfaith Dialogue

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